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The New York Review of Science Fiction

Number Seventeen
January 1990
\$2.50

Frederik Pohl The Law of the Raft

Most of us would argue that science fiction has some special merits denied to most kinds of literature—for instance, its didactic ability to educate, or at least to motivate a desire to be educated, in science; its prophylactic qualities against future shock (if you read enough science fiction hardly anything ever takes you by surprise); its capacity for objective insights into the human condition—what Harlow Shapley called “The View from a Distant Star” and so on. Arthur Clarke once put it very well when he was asked why he wrote science fiction; he said, “Because no other literature concerns itself with reality.” I’m not sure what “reality” Arthur was talking about, but it is sure that the biggest reality confronting all of us today is change—rapid and widespread change—and science fiction is a literature of change.

However, it has recently come to me that there is another way in which science fiction has assets not shared by “mainstream” literature. What led me to think this was a period of reading a lot of Mark Twain, and some of the critical assessments of his work.

At first glance, it may seem improbable that the work of this man who died sixteen years before the first science fiction magazine was published, and never wrote any of the stuff himself (let’s not get into some of his near-misses, like *The Mysterious Stranger* and *Captain Stormfield’s Visit to Heaven*, or that precursor of any number of L. Sprague de Camp novels, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*), has much to do with the subject. But I think it does, and to show what I mean, let’s consider *Huckleberry Finn*.

Everybody says *Huckleberry Finn* is Twain’s greatest work. A fair number of people (of whom I’m one) would even contend that it may well be the greatest American novel ever written. Nevertheless, almost everyone, myself included, feels that the climax of the book does not do justice to what has gone before.

If you haven’t reread *Huckleberry Finn* in the past four or five years you ought to do it now. It is one of the few books that can be read first at the age of ten, and then again every year or so for the rest of your life, finding new pleasures in it every time. The Duke’s attempt to reconstruct Hamlet’s soliloquy gets funnier the better you know the original. Huck’s relationship to his father, the numb acquiescence of the villagers in the Grangerford-Shepperton feud and its slaughter of the otherwise innocent members of both clans, the abortive lynching—above all, the nature of slavery, as given flesh in Jim—all these things become richer and more insightful as the reader does. The book is a bloody triumph, that’s what it is, and any writer who doesn’t envy it is simply himself numbed into complacent ignorance.

But then at the last, when eighty per cent of the book has been a marvel, Tom Sawyer reappears on the Phelps plantation and concocts a lunatic humbug scheme to “free” the slave, Jim, who, as Tom well knows, has in fact been freed already by testament of his late owner.

There are some funny, farcical bits in that ending. There are even a few touching ones. Nevertheless, the conclusion of the novel is an affront. Twain has touched our hearts with common human reality; then he pisses it all away in ten chapters of baggy-pants burlesque in which everyone behaves like a fool. There is only one word to describe

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In this issue

Frederik Pohl catches Mark Twain’s drift
Adrian Cole begins the Quest of *The Vulgariad*
Michael R. Collings seeks new worlds for sf poetry
Richard A. Lupoff savors
Ellen Datlow’s *Blood Is Not Enough*
Brian Stableford admires the righteous wrath of
James Morrow’s *Only Begotten Daughter*
Furthermore, there are plentiful reviews, outspoken
letters, and a round-up of 1989’s best books

Adrian Cole The Vulgariad An Epic in the Making

A phenomenal magnum opus, *The Vulgariad*, is currently being written by a hitherto nameless author, but certain information and extracts from the work have been leaked, and our informants say the word is that the epic is destined to become a major classic.

Unlike many of its contemporaries, *The Vulgariad* is not a trilogy, a quartet, quintet, or even a sextuplet. Nothing so ridiculous. No, it’s 25 volumes long.

There are no maps, charts, family trees, glossaries or pop-up monsters. It is true that there is a companion Atlas (a trilogy, in fact) but that’s by the way. Above all, this is not just another *Lord of the Rings* pastiche. No sir. You won’t find a single dwarf in these pages. No elves, wargs or Balrogs. Okay, okay—one Balrog. A little one.

And there aren’t any orcs. The monsters herein are nothing like orcs. They just happen to be called orcs. Besides, we all know orcs are only goddam goblins anyhow. That’s really original, right? Goblins. Huh!

And there is NO RING OF POWER. Or any other ring. There’s a bracelet, but it doesn’t make the wearer invisible. Just one foot high. There is, as well, no “Mordor” in the east. (Actually Mordor was in the southeast if you’ve bothered to read *Lord of the Bloody Rings*.) No, Mordor is in the east. Slightly northeast.

Background

The setting of *The Vulgariad* is a world not unlike our own. There are lots of trees, hills, valleys, but with deserts, equatorial rain forests, crevasses, volcanoes, interesting swamps . . . and that’s only the first chapter.

This splendid world is called simply *The Place*.

It is threatened by a particularly nasty villain, Lord Puke the Surpaiser, whose ambitions/emotions/philosophies are deeply interwoven by the author in a profound statement about the condition of

(Continued on page 3)



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—Ben Bova



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—Jack Williamson

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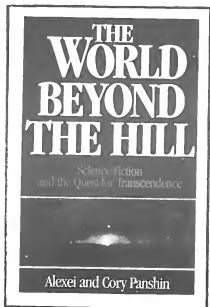
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—Willis Harman

humanity, its environment and the ecosphere . . . put as succinctly as possible, he wants to kick arse and rule the world.

And his success is assured because he has vast armies of orcs at his disposal, has completely monopolized black magic, controls the weather, poisoned *The Place* and spreads disease everytime he breathes wind. Nothing can stop him grinding all life under his heel—no power can prevent him controlling *The Place* utterly, and no way can he fail to corrupt, pervert and befoul every living atom, turning it into a black, empty lifeless waste. (God alone knows how goddam bored he'll be afterwards.)

Anyway, nothing can stop him . . . except for one thing.

The bracelet, the bloody bracelet.

Ah, but where is it?

The Characters

The first volume deals primarily with the gathering together of various unlikely characters who are to form the heroic brotherhood whose destiny is to challenge the power of Lord Pike. These are:

Carrión, the amiable village half-wit who on the surface seems a bit slow and dull-witted, but who underneath is actually a complete and utter moron;

Woodelf Dwarfthorn, a mysterious, cloaked being, who carries a carved walking stick and wears a long pointed hat with stars on it. Everyone thinks he's a magician, but in actuality he's an out-of-work astrologer, formerly the heir to the kingdom, fallen angel, and transposed teapot (possibly, that could be deposed despot, the text is unclear);

Elfhorn Dwarfwood, the other mysterious, cloaked being, who carries a thing that look a bit like a shepherd's crook and who is hooded. He is a magician;

Sir Algo Eustay, the knight in silver armor who broods a lot, but who is essentially honorable, decent, upright, and excruciatingly boring;

The dark-haired stranger who is always apart from the group,

never fully trusted, who somehow doubts his own part in the Quest because he is suffering from a terrible disease which will reduce him to madness the minute he stops thinking about it. His much-cursed name is Tony Revenant, alias Boris Halfhead;

There are certain others, all from different backgrounds, races, creeds, planets, with varying skills—swordsmen, bowmen, axemen, tax men, zealots, harrlots, ocelots, faithful retainers, loyal servants, trusty hounds, hangers-on in general.

The Plot

This is mainly concerned with the magic bracelet. Lord Pike wants it because if he gets it he'll have a matching set with the enchanted earrings and the sorcerous foot-bangle which he already has. And once he has the set he'll be totally irresistible, the cute beast.

The bracelet was lost years ago (Appendix 327 II) in a war between the Nik Naks (Genealogical table 32) and the Pad Waks (Genealogical table 33) when it fell into a crack following an earthquake and was carried by molten lava deep under the earth. It was swallowed by a huge worm-like thing, which was killed by the fierce dwarf-like-but-not-really-a-dwarf King Thundergut.

The bracelet changed hands (or as the text so aptly puts it, wrists) numerous times after this and to cut a long (a very long) story short, it ended up in a remote village, miles from anywhere, population 39, where the people are so backward the village idiot is a rock. (Incidentally, the home town of the author was cleverly used as a model for the village in the saga, although the author has been smart enough to change its name. Let's face it, "Lower Crapworthy" doesn't have too good a ring to it. So he changed it to the more appropriate "Little Piddlewallop.")

An Extract

At this point in the *Saga*, the company (now going under the alias of the Amalgamated Federation of the Bracelet and Affiliates so as not

The New York Review of Science Fiction

ISSUE #17 January 1990
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Kathryn Cremer, Features Editor; L. W. Currey, Contributing Editor; Samuel R. Delany, Contributing Editor;

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Published monthly by Dragon Press, P. O. Box 78, Pleasantville NY 10570.

\$2.50 per copy. Annual subscriptions: In U.S., \$24; \$28 Canada; \$32 First Class;

overseas, \$36 (via Air Printed Matter). For overseas air mail, please inquire. Domestic institutional subscriptions \$28.

Please make checks payable to Dragon Press, and payable in U.S. funds.

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The New York Review of Science Fiction gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Suzanne C. Anthony with this issue.
We also regret the absence of an extract from L. W. Currey's *Work in Progress* from this issue.

to be recognized) is gathered before a range of mountains, i. e. The Huge Mountains, and has to go beyond them to the Mountain of Poop. (Aficionados of the genre will note the author's uniquely imaginative use of nomenclature.) They have the magic bracelet, which exerts a strange power over anyone who wears it for any length of time, so for safety it has been hidden discretely where it won't attract undue attention to itself: in Carrion's saddlebags in his elephant's howdah.

Their intention is to get to the top of the Mountain of Poop. You may be asking yourself, why? That is, if you are still with me... hello? Ah, yes. I know at least the proof-reader must be there. Why indeed? Well, it's there, it's a challenge, and who has ever had the pleasure of sitting on top of a Mountain of Poop? Just thinking about it brings tears to your eyes.

This piece, then, from volume 12, chapter 7, page 3,294, paragraph 22:

Carrion gazed up at the towering wall of mountain that had to be passed if they were to continue their quest to the slightly north of east. He shook his head in despair.

"Impassable," he sighed.

"There must be a pass!" cried Sir Algo, shaking his enormous weapon at the wall of rock.

"No, it's an impasse," insisted Carrion.

"What do you think?" Woodelf asked Dwarfhorn.

"I pass."

"By-pass?" said Sir Algo. "That could be the answer."

"No, Carrion's right," said Elfhorn. "What about some magic, Woodelf?"

"A magic pass? No, I can't seem to pass anything."

"Are you taking anything?" said Sir Algo.

At that moment, Revenant stepped out from behind a large rock, where he had been checking himself to see if any important bits were missing. He shook his head miserably. "Sure is a miserable pass we've come to, y'all."

"What, you mean there is a pass?" cried Carrion.

Revenant stepped back, eyes flaring volcanically. "It's no use asking me! I've told you for the last dozen chapters, I don't know anything! I didn't ask to come here! I couldn't help raping those women and starting the holocaust that burned three thousand acres of forest! And I have no powers, do you understand! NONE! I'm an ORDINARY HUMAN BEING. ORDINARY, STRAIGHTFORWARD, BASIC. Well... except for the medallion I carry, and this staff. And my belt. And my golden tie-pin."

"So you can't think of a way over the mountains?" said Carrion. Revenant snarled something and shuffled off. "Excuse me, it's time I examined myself again."

It was then that Cloggi Scottison, the muscular man who looked like a dwarf but wasn't a dwarf stepped forward, leaning on his massive weapon. "There do be a way," he growled in a basso profundo that caught the attention of the entire company. (Except Revenant, who was searching among the rocks for his left leg.)

"Say on," said Elfhorn.

Cloggi thumped the ground. "The mountains were mined once." Elfhorn jerked upright. "Then we must be doubly careful where we tread. Or in Revenant's case, hop."

"You misunderstand me," snorted Cloggi. "Mined for their wealth. But that was yuns ago. Them glorious days be over."

"Never mind," said Carrion.

"They were mined, I tell ee!"

"Yes, yes," snapped Elfhorn. "What about it?"

"Them mines goes under the mountains to the very roots o' Mount Poop."

"Then what are we waiting for?" cried Sir Algo lustily.

"Ah, the way be guarded by the guardians, who do guard the way and be always on guard."

"I presume," said Woodelf, "that these guardians are the spawn of evil, corrupt and foul, dribbling pus and hurling abuse and excrement, feeding on human flesh, feasting on live organs, drinking blood..."

Cloggi nodded. "Ar, well, life be tough down in thy mines. The kids don't have it easy. Up to their necks in ordure, snapped at by wild

orgs, cave-ins, vampires, and the wages is rubbish, food's putrid, no entertainment. They never had a chance."

"What about Lord Puke?" said Carrion.

"What about him?" said Sir Algo.

"Has his influence spread down to the mines and taken control of those monsters?"

"Oh, I forgot," said Cloggi. "Lord Puke's influence has spread down to the mines and taken control of those monsters."

"Look," said Sir Algo. "I'm going to try for it over the mountains. There must be a way."

"You're a fool," scowled Elfhorn, his steely gaze machine-gunning the knight with its intensity. "There's nothing up there but ice, snowfalls, screaming winds, hurricanes, blizzards. It's blocked."

"Yes, blocked passage," nodded Woodelf.

"I told you to take something," said Sir Algo.

"Wait," said Carrion. "Sir Algo—"

"No, no, I'll go."

"Be silent, Eustay!"

"No, I'll go."

"Yes, yes, Algo."

"With me?"

"No, Eustay, go alone," said Elfhorn.

"Yes, you go," said Woodelf.

"My name isn't Hugo, it's Algo!"

And so the discussion went, until, four hours later, Sir Algo began the steep ride up into the mountains. They growled down at him, crouching like huge, crouching, growling things, the intensity of their malignant presence filled with menace and growling and quite a lot of crouching. Then the blizzard began, slamming down like a fist, punching and knocking the wind howling and growling, snow driving hard, battering the knight, pummeling him, jumping up and down on his sanny, kicking it, spitting on it, tearing at him with icy, merciless fingers. Crushed, pulped, his senses reeling, his body a mass of bruises, Sir Algo crawled back down until at last he reached his companions.

They stared at him in shocked amazement as he heaved himself up to his knees.

"I've been thinking," he said. "That was a good idea about going under the mountains."

And they moved on wearily, trudging down the narrow gorge that led them past the poisoned river, the contaminated lake, the toxic bog, the miasmic mire, etc., etc., until they came to the locked gate.

"Excrement!" snarled Woodelf.

"What is it?" said Carrion, sensing an element of slight frustration in the sorcerer's manner.

"We'll never open this."

"Why not?" said Sir Algo. "One good swipe from my mighty axe—"

"Your axe?" said Carrion, eyes lighting up with awe and reverence.

"You haven't got an axe," said Elfhorn.

"Well, no," agreed Sir Algo. "Not exactly. I meant my indestructible hammer."

"Your hammer," gasped Carrion, his face illuminated with amazement.

"What hammer is that then?" said Elfhorn.

"Well, actually, it's shaped more like a broadsword," said Sir Algo. "A broadsword!" cried Carrion, his entire body flushing with stupefaction.

"And where precisely is this broadsword?" said Elfhorn.

"Well, sword," said Sir Algo. "Knife, actually. It's only made of wood. I whittled it this morning."

"A wooden knife," gurgled Carrion. "I can scarcely believe it."

"Isn't there a password?" said Woodelf.

"Lay off that pass crap, will ya!" snarled a voice behind him. Revenant stood there—a little shakily—and glared volcanically at the gate, his orbs scarlet, like maimed, mangled circles of evanescent hatred.

"Use your power," said Woodelf. "Use your right hand! Oh, I do beg your pardon, use your left—ah... perhaps you could give it a good kick—"

"It's no good!" shouted Revenant. "Even if I opened it, the conse-

quences are bound to be dire. The mountain would disgorge boiling blood, the walls would tumble, the earth would split—"

"Okay, okay," said Woodelf, "for God's sake let someone else open the door."

Carrion had been looking very thoughtful. "Perhaps I could try something?"

"You!" laughed Woodelf. "You're just a simple buffoon, a mindless worm, a creep."

"Yes, of course," agreed Carrion. "But my simpleness, my innocence, my purity, might just do the trick."

"Good lad!" said Sir Algo. "Give it a try."

Carrion stepped up to the door and called out his words so that they echoed around the canyon like the chimes of an ancient magic. "Open this sodding door you bloody, bloody, bloody buggers!"

And lo, the door opened.

And lo, they entered.

And lo, they walked on . . . (they did this for several pages, which are cut from this extract) . . .

And very low, they reached a sort of big cavern-like area. The ceiling was pretty low, too. Suddenly they saw a gathering of fierce-looking half-men, thick-set, stocky, broad-shouldered, not-very-tall, squat, prognathous, shortish, big but not very high, beings.

"Pinch my pestle!" cried Elfwood. "Dwarves!"

The leader of the small beings strode forward and swung his immense weapon aggressively. "There are no dwarves here!" he snarled.

"You look like dwarves to me," said Elfwood.

The smallest being rammed his gigantic weapon into Elfwood's belly. "What did you say?"

"Well, dwarf-ish."

"I would have said a bit dwarf-like," said Carrion.

"Anyway, dwarf-y," nodded Sir Algo.

"No such thing!" snarled the little person. "Never heard of dwarves. Dwarves do not exist!"

"Well, who are you?" said Woodelf.

"I," said the wide but pint-sized being, "I am Sigburt Dwarf-Mangler. And this is my half-brother, Loki Dwarf-Splitter. And behind him is our cousin, Wotan Dwarf-Boiler. And next is Ethelbrand Dwarf-F—"

"Fine, fine," said Sir Algo. "Enchanted to meet you."

Sigburt's eyebrows rose. "Who speaks of enchantment? What sorcery is this? By my sacred club, Shatter-Dwarf, I curse the day that evil came here."

"Evil?" said Woodelf. "You mean, Lord Puke the Surpriser?"

"Don't mention that cursed name here!"

"You've heard of him?"

"Nay," said Sigburt. "It just came as a bit of a surprise, that's all."

"Will you help us destroy him?" pleaded Carrion. "Before he manages to destroy the entire Place."

"What, this place?"

"No, all of it."

"What, all of these caverns?"

"No, the entire Place."

"What, the caverns and the mountain?"

"And everything else, too. The complete and utter Place."

"The whole mountain range!"

"Look, you stupid, dwarf-brained mini-being, Lord Puke intends to eradicate the last vestige of life in the Place. Your place, my place, his place, every place you can think of. The Place."

Sigburt and his companions looked utterly appalled. "Well, the rotten, lousy, dwarfy bastards!"

"So you'll help us?" said Carrion.

"Sure. Won't we, lads?" The small creatures gave a lusty cheer. "Of course we will," said Sigburt. "But first we'll need some women."

"Women?" said Sir Algo.

"Yeah, we could always do with some women. It's much more fun."

"Yes, but what do you want them for?"

Sigburt eyed Sir Algo curiously. "What do you usually do with women?"

"Me?" said Sir Algo. "Well . . . rescue them, I suppose. What about

you, Woodelf?"

"Me?" said Woodelf. "Well . . . I compose ballads about them. How about you, Elfwood?"

"Me?" said Elfwood. "Well . . . I talk to them, sometimes. And sometimes I watch them—"

"Oh, yes?" said Sigburt.

"Yes . . . when they're being rescued, or when they're listening to ballads. What about you, Revenant? Revenant? Revenant, do get up off the floor and pay attention. What do you do to women?"

"With women," corrected Sir Algo.

Revenant's eyes blazed up volcanically, just as they did back on page 2217 (see para 7). "Women?" he growled. "Women revile me. They don't dare come near me. They fear me, despise me, abjure me, loathe me, detest me—"

"So, they're not very keen on you, then?" said Sigburt.

"Is that because you . . . you . . . you raped that cart full of nuns?" said Carrion.

Revenant leapt up in volcanic fury. "Must you constantly keep referring to that incident every five minutes? God, a man commits a minor mistake, a tiny little faux pas—"

"There were 86 of them—"

"An itty-bitty lapse—"

"Most of them were 90 years old—"

"A paltry, meaningless, harmless—"

"Yes, yes," said Sigburt. "Your colleagues seem to have inflicted a cruel persecution upon you. Doubtless you acted in the heat of the moment. Perfectly natural. We've all done it. Haven't we? Come on, come on, own up. Can anyone here honestly say he hasn't enjoyed the odd fling with a hundred or so octogenarian nuns?"

There were embarrassed nods around the cavern. Sigburt's point was well made.

"And what about you, young Carrion? You haven't told us what you do with women."

"I like reading books about them."

"What, picture books?"

Carrion looked away in shame. He remembered how his aunt had warned him not to talk to strange, dwarf-like men who talked about women. About how his twin sister had stroked his hair at night . . . with her axe, and how his mother had fondly bathed him . . . in the local geyser, and how his grandmother had kissed him . . . on the bottom . . . of the chin. Yes, women had played a crucial part in his world, but was there a place for them in all this chaos and confusion? Was it fair to drag them into this madness?

"What about you, Sigburt?" he blurted. "What do you know about women?"

For answer, Sigburt tore off his shirt to reveal the slim figure of a girl beneath. He shook his hair loose and stood before them as he truly was, not a man at all, but . . . a woman.

"Isn't that a woman?" cried Sir Algo.

"I could have sworn he was a dwarf," said Elfwood.

All the other dwarf-like beings stripped to reveal themselves as women. Well, not stripped naked, just down to sort of soft, girly clothes so that you knew they were women and not men.

"I AM a woman I tell you!" cried Sigburtha, and she peeled off her . . . (and here follows a passage that has, for the moment, been deleted from this extract until the result of the court case is known, the passage being somewhat ribald and some might say, not to put too fine a point on it, purely flith) . . .

"Give me the bracelet!" snarled Sigburtha. There was a stunned silence (which is hardly surprising considering the passage that was deleted).

"Bracelet, what bracelet?" said Sir Algo. "We don't know anything about a bracelet, do we chaps?"

"No . . . no . . . no way, man . . . not us . . . nope . . . nah . . . nyet . . . nix."

"I thought you were the mob carrying the bracelet," said Sigburtha.

"Oh, that bracelet!" cried Carrion.

"What?" said Elfwood.

"You know," said Carrion, "the magic bracelet."

"But why do you want it?" asked Sir Algo.

"Me?" said Sigburtha. "Well, I've got this gorgeous yellow frock, and there's this matching handbag and the most divine yellow shoes—"

"Really?" said Sir Algo. "How enchanting."

Sigburtha drew back in alarm. "Who speaks of enchantment?"

"Nay, nay," said Sir Algo. "I was merely interested in your wardrobe."

"My wardrobe? But it's just a rock alcove with a pelmet—"

"Come on, come on," said Woodelf. "Give her the blasted bracelet."

They hastily unpacked the baggage and gave Sigburtha the magic bracelet. As she placed it around her wrist, there was a flash, a sizzle of light, and an aura of dazzling brilliance shimmered about the warrior maiden. At once she was transformed, her teeth gleaming like razors, her eyes blazing volcanically (a bit like Revenant's, really) and she belched fire and spat hot fat, dribbling venom and half-digested Mars bars.

"I know that face!" cried Elfwood.

But they all knew the true nature of the fiend they faced in the ferocious firelight. It was Lord Puke the Surpriser.

"Surprise, surprise," he/she/it (I'm not sure which) said. "Now I can unleash the real horror of my plans upon you."

"Go on," said Sir Algo. "Surprise us."

"I'll get to the top of Mount Poop before you do, suckers!"

Seconds later the Surpriser and all his repulsive followers disap-

peared in another sizzling burst of dazzling lightning and pyrotechnics that made a Jean-Michel Jarre concert look like glow-worms in a San Francisco fog.

The company were about to move on, when they noticed Carrion, whose mood seemed suddenly troubled.

"What alas thee, little Carrion?" said Sir Algo warmly.

Carrion's lip trembled like a Joan Collins waterbed. "Oh, nothing really. It's just that, seeing Lord Puke as Sigburtha reminded me of the Golden Princess of the Everlasting Forest. Do you remember? Where our paths divided?"

"Of course I do," nodded Sir Algo. "I thought we'd never get out of the forking Forest."

"Ah," said Carrion. "The glorious Golden Princess, with her shimmering tresses, her wild beauty, her eyes . . . her nose . . . her lips . . ."

"Yes," said Elfwood. "Her chin . . . her neck . . . her ears."

"Yes," said Woodelf. "Her shoulders, her elbows, her wrists . . . her dainty little fingers."

"Yes, yes," said Gloggi Snottison. "Her tiny toes, her elfin eyebrows, her dainty little dimples . . . her teeny-weensy mole . . ."

"Hot dog, yeah!" cried Revenant. "And don't forget her huge, forty foot ass!" **WOW!**

Adrian Cole, author of A Place among the Fallen, lives in Devon, England.

John Ordovery To Be A Hero

New Techniques and New Questions in *Watchmen*
Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, DC Comics 1987; 400 pp. Illustrated

To the long-time comics reader, Alan Moore's work comes as both a shock and a validation. Beginning with his first widely distributed work, *Saga of the Swamp Thing* (DC Comics), continuing with *Miracleman* (Eclipse Comics), and culminating with *Watchmen* (DC Comics/Warner Books), Moore has been expanding our expectations of the medium by telling solid, intelligent stories, and adopting a sophisticated, demanding and medium-specific technique. Moore has shown comics readers and writers new ways to explore the potential of the comics format.

Comics in Europe, South America and especially Japan have a predominantly adult readership and are, for the most part, maturely written, although some foreign books attract an "adult" audience with graphic violence and explicit sex, much like the movie industry in this country. But *Watchmen*, while firmly grounded in American and British "kiddie comics" tradition, demonstrates a level of stylistic, textual maturity that was previously unknown to it, and that surpasses the adult comics of other traditions.

It is not just that Moore's writing is of superior quality. Over the last two decades, as comics in general, and super-hero comics in particular, fought for a new identity and a new, mature readership, there have been many powerful, innovative stories. In the late sixties, Denny O'Neil and Neil Adams's award-winning *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* series introduced drug addiction and other social issues of the day, opening the door for more realistic stories. In the early seventies Archie Goodwin and Walt Simonson's *Manhunter*, a series consisting mostly of short-short back-up stories, introduced the concept of a multi-part story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. And in the late seventies, Chris Claremont showed in *The New X-Men* that a soap-opera format let the writer generate multiple cliff-hangers per issue, inspiring tremendous reader loyalty. Perhaps the most important pre-Moore innovation was Wolfman and Perez's *New Teen Titans*, in which DC established that even its most sacred characters, in this case Dick Grayson/Robin, were subject to real change, paving the way for such popular works as Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*.

But despite this consistent maturation, and despite a scattering of energetic independent comics companies that had less baggage to carry and less of a commitment to industry restrictions like the Comics Code Authority, the work produced was thought of the way it always

had been; as a profusely illustrated version of something else, rather than a unique medium with a separate identity. What Moore has achieved is a conceptual breakthrough.

That he'd been working on it for years is obvious from his very early works. In one short story published in the British magazine *2000 A.D.*, a pair of chrono-cops, Joe Friday and Bill Saturday, are about to leave on a routine anti-paradox mission. In a bi-laterally symmetrical panel, they meet themselves coming back. On the left stand Joe 1 and Bill 1. Pacing them on the right are Joe 2 and Bill 2. Bill 2 is holding a steak over his eye. Between them is a shadowy potted palm. Joe 1 asks Joe 2 how the mission went. Not bad, he is told, but Bill got a black eye. We then follow Joe 1 and Bill 1 as they proceed to the commissary to get the steak they know they will need. Events go as ordained, and they find themselves back at the identical panel, having become Joe 2 and Bill 2. Later, the story returns to the panel yet again, and this time our attention is directed toward the potted palm. Through its leaves we can see Joe and Bill, this time hiding out to avoid their other selves.

The recurring panel makes the story—and would be difficult to do as well in any other medium. True, this was a slapstick, throw-away bit, but it shows Moore's insistence on telling stories that are best presented in the comics medium, and it foreshadows his most important invention: the scene-bridging caption.

In his pre-*Watchmen* series, Moore simply made sure that the caption he placed at the end of a scene had a double meaning that applied to the next scene as well. This forced the reader to carry over the emotions and impact of one scene into the next, (and the next, and the next as the chain ran out), hooking him in the flow of the story. As well as it worked on that level, in *Watchmen* Moore takes the technique farther than ever before.

Watchmen opens just after the Comedian, a violent but much honored hero, has been murdered. Rorschach, a hard-line, nearly psychotic hero who refused to retire when a federal law made heroism illegal, investigates the murder. He concludes that someone may be killing off the forcibly-retired heroes and warns Daniel Dreiberg, formerly "Nite Owl," about it, but he dismisses the idea as paranoid fantasy. Soon another retired hero, Adrian Veidt, formerly "Ozymandias," is attacked, Rorschach is captured by the police, and although as the only true super-human in *Watchmen*, he is invulnerable to physical

harm, a psychological ploy breaks "Dr. Manhattan's" last ties to humanity. Since he was America's main strategic deterrent, this leaves the Earth sliding toward World War Three. Driven to action, Dreiberg puts on his costume, frees Rorschach from jail, and sets out to save the world.

The story, which cuts expertly from the present to the past and back again, brings the characters' varied motives into direct conflict. The ending pits Rorschach's fanaticism against Dreiberg's humanity and both of them against the objective intelligence of the man behind the scenes, whose plan is so well thought out that even the partial re-involvement of Dr. Manhattan cannot disrupt it. They are all forced to consider what moral, physical and intellectual sacrifices heroism, fanaticism, and egotism require of them.

Every page of *Watchmen* is laid out according to Moore's precise directions to the artist, which averaged ten typed pages to the panel. For long stretches the pages are broken up into chessboard patterns, with the alternating panels constituting windows into different scenes. As the story is read from left to right, the scene changes with every panel. The caption boxes are there at work, providing continuity and counterpoint over and over.

A representative example of this is a sequence that runs from page nine to page thirteen of chapter three. Picking up the sequence with the third panel of page twelve, in the left-center position, we see Dr. Manhattan being interviewed on live television, while in panel four, center-right, we see Daniel Dreiberg and Laurie Juspechzyk (the former Silk Spectre), being surrounded by a street gang. On the left, the man interviewing Dr. Manhattan is saying "... I hope you'll forgive me for asking this ..." and the dialogue continues in panel four, on the right, in a caption box at the top, "... but what's up, Doc?" Underneath the caption, the thugs close in on Dan and Laurie. Panel five, bottom left. Back in the studio, Dr. Manhattan is facing another question: "... if the Reds set up in Afghanistan ..." Panel six, bottom right. Caption: "... will you be prepared to enter hostilities?" Underneath, Dan and Laurie look at each other. Dan is putting away his glasses. Top of page 13, panel one, top-left. The interviewer selects a questioner from the audience. "... Yes, you sir, and please ..." Panel two, top right. Caption: "... Let's try and make it snappy." Underneath, Dan yanks one punk off the ground by his coat, while Laurie snaps another one's arm between her knee and elbow.

It is this new presentation—allowing two different scenes to be on stage at the same time—that is difficult to duplicate in any other medium. Comics writers can use this technique as a good first step in their quest to forge a separate identity for the medium. Sadly, only a few of the best writers have picked up the technique, notably Rick Veitch, Moore's successor on *Swamp Thing*, and Grant Morrison, who in *Animal Man* and *Doom Patrol* accomplishes the same goals with images instead of words.

Often new, sophisticated techniques are accompanied by lower-than-average storytelling; the recent rash of 3-D comics are a good example. But Moore not only writes well, he asks important thematic questions about heroism.

In *Watchmen*, Moore tells us that it would be possible for a dedicated man or woman, without super-powers, to put on a costume and fight crime on the streets, breaking down the barriers between the reader and the heroes. It's unsettling to find ourselves believing, even for a little while, that our wildest dream is within reach if we only want it badly enough. Our excuses melt away. If only I were a knight in medieval times, if only I were a Captain in the Space Patrol, if only I'd been in the right place when that glowing meteor came down—Moore tells us that the failure isn't in our circumstances, but in us.

If you need motivation, Moore provides you with a buffet selection. Neatly avoiding self-defeating exposition, he finds creative ways to let the characters explain their own motives; peeks into diaries, conversations, excerpts from books. Some of the heroes did it because they felt it needed doing. Some did it for a sexual thrill, some did it for the publicity, because they were hired to, because they were obsessed, or simply because they liked the violence. They all had surface reasons to face the world in costume, but Daniel Dreiberg explains the deeper reason: "In costume I feel so confident. It's like I'm on fire, and all the ... killers, all the wars in the world are just cases, just problems to solve."

Most readers of heroic fantasy start reading it in their teens, a time when day-to-day life is overwhelming and we are insecure and awkward. Heroic fantasy offers an escape and a chance to feel, at least for a little while, that our relationship to the world has changed, allowing us to shrink the world and its problems while enlarging and ennobling ourselves. It lets us step out of ourselves and into the mind and body of someone else, someone carefully designed to be confident, in control, and larger than life—power fantasies.

When Dreiberg, as Nike Owl, talks about the confidence he feels in costume, he is giving voice to the soul of heroic fiction. Impotent and uncertain as Dan Dreiberg, he changes to someone else, someone who can handle the world, doing in his reality what we can only do fictionally in ours. In other comics, the hero is always in control. Whether it's Superman/Clark Kent or Bruce Wayne/Batman, unlike Dreiberg they are only pretending to be mild-mannered in their out-of-costume identities. Dreiberg's dramatic, honest change in personality forces us into a possibly unpleasant re-examination of our heroic dreams.

Even dreams that go farther than being a hero among men are not immune from this forced re-examination. *Watchmen's* one superhero, nicknamed Dr. Manhattan by the Pentagon, has been the mascot of U.S. military superiority since the late Fifties. A normal man before the accident that elevated him, his overwhelming power has kept the nuclear peace between America and Russia for almost thirty years, with America clearly on top. Yet he is becoming disinterested with the problems of a world of humans he is now far superior to; not hostile, just indifferent.

Dr. Manhattan seems the epitome of the heroic dream. His control is apparently absolute; all human problems are smaller than he is. But Moore tells us the result would not be a god-on-Earth because the more superior you are to men, the less you care about human values. Again Moore is examining a bizarre situation with absolute seriousness; with the limitless reaches and resources of the Universe to examine and explore, would you still care about human men? Eventually, your humanity might slip away completely.

Moore tells us life is a process of feedback and deciding to save the world, even a small part of it, puts heavy weight on you. In the course of the book, Moore shows this strain taking its sometimes dreadful toll on the lives and sanity of his characters. *Watchmen* has no patly ordered packages, no triumphs of heaveho over incredible odds, and even the evil mastermind behind the conspiracy is not actually evil. It is ironic, if evil is only ignorance of the truth, that the mastermind here appears evil only because he knows more of the truth of the world than the others. He understands heroism better than they do, and perhaps better than the reader did.

Having shown us that we are responsible for our lack of heroic action and noble demeanor, Moore ends the book by attacking the foundation of the dream. Even in costume, he tells us, we would remain human, fallible, and as controlled by events as ever. For *Watchmen's* most serious statement is that growing up means accepting ourselves as humans instead of heroes, sometimes on top of things, sometimes not, realizing that even in costume we wouldn't be in control and that right and wrong wouldn't be black and white.

The title *Watchmen* comes to us from the Latin version of Plato's *Republic*, from a phrase that translates as "... but then who watches the watchmen?" In the book, the phrase is used as a slogan by anti-violence protestors to express their displeasure at the unsupervised activities of the costumed heroes. But the sophisticated double-entendre is Moore's trademark. Here the second meaning sums up the forced re-examination of the love of heroic fantasy that is the underlying theme of the book: Who are you who reads heroic things like *Watchmen*, and why do you?

Watchmen has many levels and can be re-read many times. Hidden symbols keep popping out and the content and meaning change with the mood and maturity of the reader. *Watchmen* deserves the attention of anyone who reads heroic fantasy, and the attention of those who reject it, expecting only childish power fantasies. ▀

The author wishes to thank Marilyn G. Ordovery, Adjunct Professor of Law, University of Pennsylvania, for her assistance on this piece. Thanks Mom!

The Law of the Raft

Continued from page 1

the last one-fifth of *Huckleberry Finn*, and that word is *dumb*.

Surprisingly, T. S. Eliot likes the ending. His opinions can't be dismissed as the affected blind spots of an effete Harvard graduate and adoptive Briton, either; Eliot certainly left his origins as far behind him as he could, but he was Missouri-born and the Mississippi River had to be almost as daunting an icon in his childhood experience as in Twain's. Eliot, in fact, selects that river as the central metaphor of *Huckleberry Finn*. The Mississippi represents the world and the stream of time. Floating down the river, like life, is a one-way trip. You can't go back; you can only experience what fate has for you at each stage as you pass along. And, says Eliot admiringly, Twain's masterpiece in the novel is that it end recapitulates its beginning: in both sections Tom Sawyer dominates and the narrative is farcical. This makes the novel symmetrical, and thus—says Eliot, the poet of form—formally satisfying.

Then Eliot goes on to add that, anyway, nobody has ever been able to think of a *better* way to end the book, and besides the last paragraph—spoken by Huck after all the problems have been solved and Jim is free—redeems it all.

This is the last paragraph:

"But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before."

Eliot says that isn't only good, it is "the only possible concluding sentence." Well, it is and it isn't.

One objection is factual. We know that Huck *said* he was going to light out for the territory. But we also know that what he *did* was to return to St. Petersburg, because Mr. Twain told us that himself in his two later stories, *Tom Sawyer Abroad* and *Tom Sawyer, Detective*.

Possibly Twain had other plans for Huck. Actually, we know that at a later time he began the writing of a quite different sequel to *Huckleberry Finn*. The new work was to be entitled *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians* and would in fact take Huck out to the territory—sort of. But Twain gave it up. That book was never finished and never published, while the other two survive.

At least, they survive on a few library shelves, if not in the minds of most academics. It is interesting to note that, in all the critical comments on the ending of *Huckleberry Finn*, there is hardly a line that suggests the critic even knows of the existence of the two later novels. They are simply ignored.

To be sure, there is every reason to ignore them, because they are very bad books. Likely enough when Twain's ill-planned business ventures went bust he backed out these two dreary potboilers for quick pay; I would not like to believe that he thought they were good. Nevertheless they do exist, and they do say what they say about Huck's later exploits, and what they say has no more to do with Huck's stated intentions—or with the central human issues of *Huckleberry Finn*, namely freedom and morality—than do the chapters on the Phelps plantation.

Perhaps there is no dramatic conclusion, built-in or sequel, available to Mark Twain which would do his novel justice. That is pretty much what one critic, Leo Marx, says:

It is surely reasonable to ask that the conclusion provide a plausible outcome to the quest [for freedom]. Yet freedom, in the ecstatic sense that Huck and Jim knew it aboard the raft, was hardly to be had in the Mississippi Valley in the 1840s, or, for that matter, in any other known human society. A satisfactory ending would inevitably cause the reader some frustration.

And the reason for this, Marx says, is that Twain was trying to do the impossible. The theme of *Huckleberry Finn*, Marx says, is morality. Fiction, and the critics who feed on it, can deal with such questions only on an individual basis, while Twain was discussing was social morality.

All that, I think, is quite true—up to a point.

Twain was certainly concerned about social morality, especially the false morality of the society he grew up in. His beloved wife Livia is reputed to have prevented him from speaking out as freely as he would have like on such subjects, for fear of scandal, but Twain's works are full of denunciations of hypocrisy, cruelty, dishonesty and general moral blindness on the part of the church, state, "solid citizens" and every other putative exemplar of righteousness. A Connecticut Yankee, *Joan of Arc*, *The Mysterious Stranger*, *The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg*—they all carry the same message. An occasional individual, especially an immature one like Huck, may be pure, but those who lead society are corrupt, hypocritical or, at best, merely feeble-minded.

Of course, Twain was not the only writer to have so poor a view of social morality, though I would argue he is perhaps the greatest. Others might propose Voltaire, in for example *Candide*, or Swift, in *Gulliver's Travels*. But Twain tried something harder than either of those authors dared. Voltaire and Swift allowed themselves fantastic farce; Twain reported on reality. If he carried his reportage to an extreme, as in *The Gilded Age*, it was nevertheless only exaggeration, not outright fantasy. What was harder, he gave us characters who were human enough to bring us sometimes close to tears. No rational person can really care what happened to Cuneo and the Laputians; they aren't real. But no one can read *Huckleberry Finn* without desiring very much that Huck and Jim should somehow find their heart's desire.

It is exactly this touching humanity of the boy and the slave that make the last ten chapters of the novel ring so false. Twain would not have failed so badly there if he had not succeeded so wonderfully in the middle. If Swift and Voltaire saved themselves such a debacle, it was because they never reached so high.

E. M. Foster once had something to say about the endings of novels:

In the losing battle that the plot fights with the characters, it often takes a cowardly revenge. Nearly all novels are feeble at the end. This is because the plot requires to be wound up. Why is this necessary? Why is there not a convention which allows a novelist to stop as soon as he feels muddled or bored? Alas, he has to round things off, and usually the characters go dead while he is at work, and our final impression of them is through deadness.

It is true that conventions exist which impose this "revenge." They are classically based: it was Aristotle who said that comedy must end with a wedding, tragedy with a doom for the hero brought about because of his own nobility (and Twain said almost the same, at the end of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, when he told us that novels are supposed to end either with a wedding or a funeral).

Twain, though, was a writer who transcended conventions. He was the one who converted the novel from the high-blown century of James Fenimore Cooper and Sir Walter Scott to the easy, limpid colloquialism of *Huckleberry Finn*. When Ernest Hemingway said, "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*," it was that he was talking about. I don't mean (and Hemingway didn't either mean) the backwoods Missouri dialects or the quaint figures of speech. What Twain did was reconcile written English with spoken, and everyone after him learned. (Even James Joyce was influenced by Twain, although it is doubtful that Twain would have recognized the affinities—and certain that Livia would have been dismayed by them.)

Ending *Huckleberry Finn* was a sore trial for Mark Twain. He gave up on the incomplete manuscript at least twice, put it away for varying periods because he didn't know where to go with it next. Then he finished it in a quick burst of energy. Why? How? One can only speculate. He did revisit the Mississippi River just before its completion; likely that was a stimulus to his glands. And around then (I conjecture) he saw a "plotly" way out—not a good one, but a possible one—and set down all that nonsense about the recapture and mock rescue of Jim before he could change his mind.

I wish he had had a better inspiration. I wish that Twain, who had already shattered one confining convention, had found a way to break through the conventions of symmetry and plot. I even think I know a

place in his novel where it would have been profitable for him to look for it, and that is what I call The Law of the Raft.

See, I disagree with T. S. Eliot. I think the central metaphor of *Huckleberry Finn* is not the Mississippi River itself, but instead the raft that floats on it. That raft is the Great Good Place. While Huck and Jim are on it, they are not only safe but free. Even when they are invaded by the no-good petty villains who call themselves the Duke and the Dauphin it remains their home and their refuge, because it is a microcosm of the perfect society—theirs and, I think, Twain's own.

What is that perfect society? Huck tells us explicitly:

What you want above all things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind toward the others.

How wonderful! It is the dream of every Utopian idealist the world has ever known, not only on a raft but in the world at large. It is the ideal, right now, of Messrs. Bush and Gorbachev, not to mention the Pope, the Irish assassins (on both sides), the anti-nuclear activists, the pro-lifers, and the pro-choicers, the Communists and the anti-Communists, the Gay Rights supporters and the Moral Majority... and, for that matter, of me and, I am willing to bet, of you.

Of course, we don't manage to put our dreams into practice. We can't. We each have our own ways of attaining the Law of the Raft and, as those ways are frequently in conflict, our only strategy for achieving Utopia is to persuade, force or terrorize everyone else into thinking (or at least behaving) as we do. So we build nuclear missiles, or bomb pubs and movie theaters, or set fire to clinics, or get laws passed to make others conform to what we think is right. And if those stratagems don't work, as they don't, we tend to drift into thoughts of revenge.

But there is no room on a raft for either compulsion or revenge.

At the beginning of Huck and Jim's voyage they don't need either. It's just the two of them, floating blissfully downstream, smoking their pipes and dangling their feet in the water and catching a catfish now and then. The idyll isn't threatened. But when it is, when they are invaded by the loathsome Duke and Dauphin, how do they respond?

Not with force or revenge. They deal with the intrusion with tolerance. They do their best to follow The Law of the Raft, to make the scoundrels satisfied, or as satisfied as it is in their capacities to be, so that everyone on the raft can "feel right and kind toward the others."

Huckleberry Finn has a message, and that is it. The message is: we should all play nicely together.

The reason the ending is so "dead" is not merely because of the exigencies of the plot. It is because Twain was expressing a moral imperative in his novel, and he turned his back on it at the end because he could not see a moral ending to the story. Slavery was still there; the sweet and gentle Phelps and Aunt Sallys lived by the labor of slaves; The Law of the Raft could not extend past the raft itself.

We know that Twain, like H. G. Wells, turned bitter toward the end of his life. Probably in both cases the reason was that their yearning humanitarian souls could see no great, moral resolution to the problems of the world.

But Wells didn't blind himself by the rules of symmetry. Wells wrote a kind of novel that could, at least in its own pages, transcend the real world's limitations. He wrote science fiction.

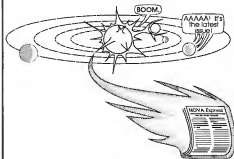
He wrote, for instance, *In the Days of the Comet*. Wells's description of the squalor and stink of the lives of poor people in late Victorian England is as savage and accurate as anything Twain had to say about Missouri. But the rules of science fiction are not the same as those of "mainstream." The science-fiction rules allowed Wells to end his story with The Law of the Raft made universal: along came Wells's comet, and the gases of its tail made everyone satisfied and feeling right and kind to the others.

What is wrong with the ending of *Huckleberry Finn*, at root, is that it is a "happy ending" and thus a fraud. Jim might be freed, but he was still black and penniless, and his wife and child were still in slavery. If any "mainstream" novel tackles the question of social morals, it can't have a happy ending that is not fraudulent.

But science fiction can, because it is a literature of change. And wonderfully, now and then, it does. ▲

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James P. Blaylock, Pat Cadigan, K. W. Jeter, Joe Lansdale, Brad Linaweaver, George R. R. Martin, Pat Murphy, Tim Powers, David J. Schow, Kim Stanley Robinson, Lew Shiner, Bud Simons, Howard Waldrop, Walter Jon Williams



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Robert Kilheffer
After Winning the War:
Fantasy and Science Fiction's Fortieth Year
(part II)

VI. Notables

As I mentioned at the start, diversity is one of *F & SF's* strengths. Thus, though the general trends and comments I have identified obtain, there are many, many stories in the twelve 40th year issues that do not fit well into any broad categories, and some of these deserve mention before we proceed to other questions.

One such is Mike Resnick's "Kiriynaga" (November 1988), winner of the Hugo Award for Best Short Story. Though it has already received its share of discussion in the pages of this journal, no consideration of the year in *F & SF* would be complete without mention of the award-winning story.

I have misgivings about the story, both mechanical and thematic. The story is flawed logically: as I read, I waited in vain for Resnick to address the fundamental philosophical contradiction in Koriba's position, and he never does. Koriba claims and aims to establish a primitive, traditional society in Kiriynaga, and he vehemently rejects aid or interference from Maintenance. Indeed, he is prepared to embark on an actual war against Maintenance by the end of the story. Yet early on it is acknowledged that Maintenance is vital to the survival of Kiriynaga, in that the satellite utopia needs occasional repair and orbital adjustment that only Maintenance can provide. Kiriynaga cannot go on without Maintenance. This led me to see a deep pessimism in the story, a conclusion that the traditional cultures are doomed in a world of technology; their survival will depend on that technology, and so they cannot survive.

Certainly, the irony of Koriba's position is clear in the story, and it is possible that Resnick thought it best to leave it for the reader to discern this and the hopelessness of his cause. Yet this requires the story to maintain an illogical situation—no one, not Koriba, not the dissenting chiefs, nor the people from Maintenance, ever recognize the problem, and this makes them all seem abysmally near-sighted. Koriba's self-delusion would still work and work logically even if he were confronted with the brick wall of the facts head on, and then persisted in his hopeless crusade. As it is, he and the others seem dense and are unbelievable.

My biggest objection, however, is the impossible simplicity of its theme. It perpetuates the common American myth of the Innocent Savage—the belief that greed, envy, and the abuse of the environment and fellow men are the product and property of civilization, especially Western civilization, and that primitive cultures lived in some voluntary harmony with the natural world, wasting nothing and preserving its beauty. The truth is that societies like those of the American Indians or primitive Africans were limited by their power to influence their environments, and their need to do so—if their philosophies reflected a respect for and love of and gentleness toward Nature, this was the product of their dependence on and fear of it, the result of their circumstances, not the cause of them. When they could, these peoples by and large did as much as possible to bend the environment to their will, to the benefit of their survival. New England Indians regularly set controlled forest fires to remove dead wood and underbrush (though this could benefit the forests too, it was done to improve deer hunting). Plains Indians would run whole herds of bison off of cliffs to die; the huge piles of bones at the bases of these cliffs show that the myth that not a morsel was wasted applies only to those carcasses the Indians carted home. If the Indians did not severely deplete the bison population, it was not because of some enlightened philosophy; it was because they did not have the power or population numbers to do so.

The myth of the innocent savage is borne of the twentieth century's difficulty in controlling power at levels never before commanded by the human race. Dreaming of a Golden Age, however, a time of less power and simpler life, is not constructive, and will not contribute to a solution. In this way, at least, "Kiriynaga" is related to the group of stories discussed above with the escape theme: the myth

of the innocent savage is the modern American escape from the reality of human nature and the real problems of world-shattering power. This may go some way toward explaining why "Kiriynaga," with all its problems, won the Hugo and generated so much interest. It appeals strongly to this idealized version of the world, offering a nearly perfect statement of the myth.

"The Sea Man" by Jane Yolen (March 1989) is a pretty, lyrical short piece that advocates kindness and understanding between all people without resorting to cliché or didactic bludgeoning. The historical setting gives it the timelessness of a fable, and makes the moral tone acceptable and indeed desirable. Much as I love dark, disturbing fiction, it can be a great relief to see an optimistic message delivered so beautifully.

"Privacy" by David Brin (September 1989) is presented as a response to "some stereotypes in today's sci-fi: e.g., 'young punk kids who somehow get to be more technologically competent than the best engineers, and a complete aversion to depicting the place of old people in the future'" (p. 141). This is a fair representation of the story's thrust, and this aspect makes it refreshing, but I am concerned to mention it here because of its problematic ending. The first three-quarters are a well-written if standard appeal to the younger generation on behalf of the old; it celebrates the value of the elders' experience and wisdom, and depicts their applicability even to the lives of the young.

But then, it seems the old mentor of a group of young punks, who has earned their trust and admiration throughout the story, betrays them. The invasive information network is the demon these boys hate, and, against his promises, the old man enters a documentary, using visual and audio footage of the boys, onto the public access net. The boys' trust is shattered, all of them are upset, and one kills himself. What can we make of this?

The old man's duplicity offers some validation of the youths' earlier prejudiced beliefs. It is not, however, this simple. Neither set of assumptions, neither the punks' prejudice nor the elder's plea, can be accepted as the whole truth. Instead, the story offers the insight that people, young or old, are subject to the same self-centered impulses, and age does not guarantee a person as good or bad; they are all examples of the same, flawed creature. The one boy cannot accept this, and seeks instead the certainty of death, the reliability of the warrior code among the youth gangs, the trustworthiness of single combat. The other boys, one feels, have truly learned.

The old man's betrayal is disturbing, but its effect is to make "Privacy" a more significant story overall, by denying the simple formula promised by the beginning, and forcing instead a deeper insight.

VII. New Voices

F & SF's diversity extends to its authorship. Alongside the long-established names appear many younger, lesser known writers, occasionally even someone's first professional sale. Among the many newer writers who have been published in *F & SF's* 40th year, there are two whose regular appearances have been particularly good: Ray Aldridge and Nancy Echemendy. Neither of these writers' stories are quite comparable to the very best of *F & SF's* 40th year, but they are good and should be names to watch.

Ray Aldridge has a nearly ubiquitous presence in these pages. More of his stories (4) than of any other single author appeared in the past year of *F & SF*. Though he can tend toward a pulp-adventure style, his contributions proved to be reliably competent, and they create a special interest by addressing one central theme, the relationship between humanity and its technology.

"Floating Castles" (December 1988) presents us with a primitive, warlike society which drives itself to ruin by avarice, impatience, and

uncontrolled application of the technology it acquires from a superior interstellar people: the Neomach, an artificially-intelligent shape-shifting vehicle. In trying to bend the machine to their will, and force it into their society by using it (against its programming) for war, they push it too far; it determines that they are dangerous and must be prevented from doing further harm. It isn't Aldridge's best—the planet and its people are not very deeply drawn—but its first-person narrator, Taladin, one of the chieftains of the barbaric society, makes up for this somewhat by lending the story an earnestness and energy it might have lacked in third person. By the end, the Neomach, having reproduced itself, has trapped Taladin and all his people in individual replicas of itself. From his floating prison he muses:

I wonder if any of my people are left free. Somewhere, I feel certain, an ancient pangalactic woman sits with her weak, clever friends, and wonders the same. I see them rubbing their soft little hands together and laughing, thinking that the stupid, greedy wolfheads have gotten just what they deserved. (p. 50)

They are utterly isolated from each other, and can experience and communicate with the world only through the Neomach. They have become entirely technologized, enslaved to and encased in the machines they abused.

"Blue Skin" (March 1989) considers a similar theme in a very different context. Here, an abused bond servant receives a computerized reconstruction of her deceased owner, based on a section of his skin attached to an interface. Again, Aldridge shows us versions of the technologized person: in this case, the dead man resurrected in a machine, and an entirely artificial female person-construct, Geem, who had been the master's servant as well. Geem is the embodiment of humanity seen through the lens of its technology: the bond servant, Delaph, recalls, "When Margolo tired of hurting me, Geem renewed his enthusiasm" (p. 22), and "She was sharp everywhere: sharp, predatory face, elbows and knees like bony pickaxes; tiny, sharp breasts, sharp fingernails. Even her red-painted toenails were long and sharp..." (p. 26). Now, in control of her former master, Delaph tortures him routinely. Technological power fuels her hate and gives vent to her cruelty, as it fed the innate warlike tendencies of the people in "Floating Castles." And, like them, when Margolo has been made a combination of a computer construct and living flesh, he has become powerless, entirely dependent on the technology, imprisoned by it, and entirely vulnerable.

"Chump Change" (August 1989) is the least powerful of Aldridge's *F & SF* stories, shallower than the others and relying on a punchline ending, but it does play with the same idea of the individual isolation that comes with a world dominated by technology. It is set in a salvage yard of the far future, a place where the few poor denizens live entirely surrounded by machines. "A million metal bodies lay in shining drifts, piled high. Occasionally an arm or leg rattled—the last spasm of a not-quite dead power cell. Otherwise, the dump was silent" (p. 67). The scavengers are enemies, rivals, and live alone in hideaways among the machine wreckage.

Aldridge's best is "Steel Dogs" (September 1989), another tale in which humans live dominated and enslaved by the technology they created. The background is more carefully and evocatively drawn here, and the first person narrative again adds a poignancy the story would otherwise have lacked. It takes place on a mechanized resort island, controlled by a computer intelligence and peopled with reventants, androids whose brains are the encased, imprisoned minds of dead criminals and others. The narrator is one of these: "Fail-safes, deadman switches are built into all our hulks; after all, Droom couldn't have the tourists terrorized by criminal zombies should we decide to run amok. Eh? ... It's true that I'm dead already. Still, it's the only sort of life I'll ever have, and I'm somewhat reluctant to give it up" (p. 22). Fashions change, and the guests don't come to Droom anymore; the guiding computer (also called Droom) defends itself against the "Bone-pickers," surviving humans from other islands who come to search for farmland—it believes that one day the guests will return. The androids now are employed in this defense, killing the pickers.

However, in this story, the human element overcomes the tech.

Read This

Recently read and recommended by
Andrew Weiner:

Car's Eye, Margaret Atwood. Atwood returns to the mainstream. But just as it can be argued that *The Handmaid's Tale* was not really sf (it's too good), one can make a case that Atwood was always a kind of sf writer. It's not just her offhand familiarity with the culture of science (*Car's Eye* is studded with clever scientific metaphors). It's how she writes, like one of H. G. Wells's Martians, an intellect vast and cool and only rarely sympathetic, least of all to herself.

Phases of Gravity, Dan Simmons. Not even remotely science fiction, but all thanks to Bantam Spectra for publishing it anyway.

Three Scientists and Their Gods, Robert Wright. Worth it for its profile of Edward Fredkin, who thinks the universe might be a computer program, although the going gets tedious thereafter.

Fade, Robert Cormier. Antique plot device, awkward structure, limp, central character, wretched conclusion. But you understand, finally, what Stephen King and Harlan Ellison are talking about in their ecstatic blurbs. Cormier grips you, like almost nobody else.

The Passion of Ayn Rand, Barbara Branden. In which it rapidly becomes clear that Ayn Rand was just as awful a human being as you always suspected.

The Way We Die Now, Charles Willeford. The last Hoke Mosley thriller, in which the featured psychopath turns out to be Hoke Mosley. No one wrote a better psycho-killer novel than Charles Willeford.

Cold Hand in Mine, Robert Aickman. Not his best (see *The Wine-Dark Sea*), but even second-string Aickman transcends most modern urban fantasy. Marvelously leisurely plot development, powerful dream-like eroticism, and a resolute refusal to tie up loose ends.

In the Skin of a Lion, Michael Ondaatje. Anarchy, technology, and the mystery of Ambrose Small. The building of modern Toronto as seen through a magic realist lens. Ondaatje, a poet turned novelist, writes—there's no other word for it—beautifully.

Aandred, the narrator, rebels against Droom, killing it and thereby dooming himself to a slow winding-down death, to save a human he encounters, and in whom he recognizes the courage and determination that he recalls in himself from his living days. The touching final scene, in which the dead Aandred is revered as the savior of the now-settled pickers, provides a satisfying conclusion in this story that the others lack.

Aldridge considers and reconsiders this theme in his stories, and his latest, "Steel Dogs," hints that he is expanding his vision of it, pressing beyond the simple statement of the problem evident in his earlier stories, and seeking a solution.

Nancy Etchemendy has two stories in *F & SF*'s past year, and her performance is even more promising. She offers two solid, powerful horror stories, starting with "The Sailor's Bargain" (April 1989). This is a fairly standard, well-written curse story, but two effective twists at the end raise it above the average. Usually, these stories have a straight moral resolution: the transgressor gets his come-uppance and the balance of the world is restored. Not so here. The origin of the curse

is a complex moral dilemma, a no-win situation, and the resolution is no more clean-cut. The captain of a sinking vessel, faced with death for himself and all his passengers, strikes a bargain with the elements, offering the life of a baby to save them all. What else could he do? "I mean it's all in the numbers. A hundred and twenty-nine to one. A hundred and twenty-nine men, women, and children, sunk to Davy Jones. Or one baby girl . . . one baby girl . . ." (p. 157). He becomes a tragic character, placed in an impossible situation, trapped by fate. Yet, even though he has suffered ever since in his conscience, and though the little girl succeeds in beating the wind and saving herself, he is killed.

Moreover, the balance is not restored. Despite the death of the sailor, all is not righted in the world, for the girl beats the wind only by pledging herself to a nun. This places the story for a moment in danger of having an unsatisfactorily simple solution, "God and religion save." It is rescued in the final line, which likens the girl's bargain with God and the saints to the sailor's with the evil wind: "This life is right for me. And even if it were not, a bargain is a bargain, part and parcel" (p. 161). The phrase "a bargain is a bargain, part and parcel," has echoed throughout the tale as the doom of the curse, the dirge of the sailor and the inevitability of the girl's fate. The girl is still a prisoner of fate—a better fate perhaps, a living fate—but no more free. The problems are not easily and cleanly solved in this story; the world does not return to normal, and this makes "The Sailor's Bargain" far and away more effective than most examples of the curse story.

"Cat in Glass" (July 1989) is even better. "The Sailor's Bargain" tends to wander a little as it moves; the simple plot is filled out with background and extra characters which do not play into the conclusion in any significant way. "Cat in Glass" wastes not a word, but moves steadily and confidently toward its equally disturbing end.

In classic horror fashion, dating from Poe on down, she starts with the narrator speaking after the events in question, having suffered and now probably somewhat insane. As it did for Poe, this approach provides the sense of doom and inevitability that drives the reader through the story. Wisely, Etchemendy avoids easy gimmicks to grab the reader; rather, she sticks to the most potent source of horror—the unknown. The mechanism by which the cursed cat statue does its evil is not ever made entirely clear, but it doesn't need to be and is better left vague, since the motive force of evil in the Cat is chaos. Too solid and certain a definition of the Cat's actions would contradict its nature.

Again, Etchemendy eschews the standard resolution of such tales in favor of a more complex and powerful conclusion. Having seen her sister killed by the Cat when she was young, and having had her own daughter killed by it as well, Amy the narrator loses her mind and spends years in an institution. Finally removed by her now grown second daughter, she returns to her house, where she finds the Cat displayed prominently, and fears for the lives of her two granddaughters. In desperation and terror, she takes a hammer to the Cat.

I was trembling all over, but I went on and on in an agony of satisfaction while glass fell like moonlit rain. There were screams. "Grandma, stop! Stop!" I swung the hammer back in the first part of another arc, heard something like the thump of a fallen ripe melon, swung it down on the cat again. I couldn't see anymore. (p. 20)

Of course, she has killed one of her grandchildren herself. At the end, she is back in the hospital, and does not realize what she did. Again, Etchemendy has placed her character in an unwinnable situation: if she did not act, the Cat would kill her grandchild, but in acting she does the same. Doom is inescapable.

VIII. The Role of the Editor

It has struck me as I've pored (again and again) over the pages of the fourth year of *F&SF* that there seems to be little, or too little, regular editing going on. That is, many stories impressed me as requiring just a little less fat, or a little more clarity, to make them really smooth, and others showed signs of glaring inconsistencies, any of which could have been cleaned up by the rigorous application of the blue pencil.

"Phantom" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch (June 1989), for example,

is a standard horror story about a possessed piano. It's handled reasonably well, but it isn't enough of a story to support its 25-page length. Rusch makes an admirable attempt to fill the space with interesting detail, many characters, and well-drawn background, but ultimately it amounts to little; most of the detail is never used, never becomes important to the story, and seems gratuitous.

Similarly, Chet Williamson's "Eternal Ties" (February 1989) suffers from far too much background material. The long, complex development of the characters and their relationship is interesting, and provides a couple of creepy moments, but it builds up expectations that the end disappoints. The story has the simplest ghostly revenge plot, revealed punchline-style in the last paragraph, and this would have been a nice if predictable finish to a shorter piece; but with all the depth of background, it needs a conclusion of greater complexity which would tie it all together.

Other stories have different problems. Marc Laidlaw's "Uneasy Street" (September 1989) is a strange and disturbing horror story set among the hopeless ranks of the homeless. The problem it has is not with length or balance, but clarity. The mysterious drug Easy haunts the story like a ghost; it appears sourcelessly in alleyways and falls from the sky in full plastic trash bags, providing the suffering masses with needed relief—and hooking them desperately on the substance, sapping what little remains of their drive and dignity. But what is it? Some hints suggest aliens, others a government plot to keep the teeming multitudes of the poor in line—but it's frustrating that no clearer answer is provided. And the dynamics of the drug in society are not explored. Do only the poor have it? If so, why don't they sell it, if it's so effective? If not, why is the rest of society not lolling about as well?

In Michael Armstrong's "Terminator" (July 1989), one cop describes a terrorist suspect as "White male, early thirties, stable marriage, good job, no previous record," and moments later elaborates, "... the mucker's a trans: beard, tits, and probably both genitalia. Sprague says the hips make it an original female, but we're not quibbling" (pp. 69-70). It doesn't seem possible to reconcile the two, especially since, if the mucker was, as far as can be determined, originally a female, why would any attempt to classify one way or the other lean toward male? The first description sounds so precise—how could the cop be so sloppy? How could a trans like this have what would be tossed off as a "stable" marriage? Even if there is some way to clear this up logically, it needs to be explained.

P. E. Cunningham's "Purpose" (July 1989), one of a series of stories by this author, functions on some untenable assumptions. On a world of humans and telepathic flying reptiles, telepaths and non-telepaths, humans and pteros, are educated in the same classroom! What an unfair advantage the telepaths would have—and, indeed, they demonstrate the ability to read the teacher's mind, though nothing is made of it. The ptero telepaths speak always in telepathy; yet the humans persist, even with pteros, in speaking out loud. All in all, it seems that Cunningham has abandoned logic in favor of presenting a typical young adult plot and characters in its trappings.

In "A World Waiting" (August 1989), Sheila Finch creates a character with similar inconsistencies. Oona Nikos, a xenolinguist, trained not only to learn the words and syntax of other tongues, but also to absorb the world-views of other species to facilitate communication, touches down on Mynah for a vacation and finds that her sister is dead and her brother-in-law has taken the extreme and radical measure of placing her unborn fetus in the womb of one of the dolphins he works with, allowing the dolphin to carry it to term. Despite her training in accepting new ideas and wholly alien world views, Oona acts like a half-educated throwback, not even considering the idea that makes her feel "nauseated" (p. 39). She insists adamantly, "You couldn't let her die in peace, and take her child with her!" (p. 41). This is unbelievable and inconsistent.

Alan Dean Foster's "Jackalope" (April 1989) contains the most blatant example of editorialiality. The hunt for that rarest of game, the jackalope, degenerates and becomes sillier and sillier, introducing all of a sudden more horrible and less probable creatures of the untamed American wilderness, culminating in the siege of a cave refuge by a grizzphant. My complaint does not lie here. It lies in the last line. Grass and not funny, it adds nothing to the story and ends it on a deeply low

note: "A kind of thunder rolled across the Bitterroots one more time as the unicorn farted" (p. 102).

Perhaps my tastes in these matters are different from Ed Ferman's. It's possible, but I think it more likely that there simply isn't enough editing of the story's content, and it's a shame, because this sort of attention could make passable stories good, and good stories great.

IX. Conclusions

Historically, *F & SF* was the magazine maintaining the standards of literate science fiction and fantasy. While other *sf* magazines, such as *Asimov's*, placed the emphasis on ideas over execution, letting clunky and sloppy writing by when a story housed a really new and interesting concept, *F & SF* demanded competent, accomplished writing, if necessary over new ideas. When Ed Ferman, fresh out of college and relatively uneducated in *sf*, took over the editorship in 1965, he came to a magazine alone in the field in its commitment to this ideal, and under his guidance it lost none of its dedication or quality.

Things changed in the early seventies, and today, the pendulum has swung almost entirely in the other direction. Literate science fiction is the standard; as I mentioned above, retellings of old ideas are common and accepted when they are executed well. *Asimov's* and *Omens* and many other smaller magazines are devoted to publishing high quality, highly literate fiction. *F & SF* is no longer alone. In a sense, *F & SF* and Ed Ferman have won the war.

Blood is Not Enough, edited by Ellen Datlow

New York: William Morrow, 1989; \$19.95 hc; 319 pp.

reviewed by Richard A. Lupoff

Certainly the vampire is one of the most persistent figures in our literature; Vlad, Varney, Lestat or Noefaratu, he is the reigning monarch of dark fantasy. There is about him the cold breath of the tomb. He is, among his other personae, the Antichrist. Through him we will not so much triumph over death as embrace death, become one with it, and thus endure forever. Never truly dying, we will need no resurrection.

There is an undeniable erotic appeal in the vampire. He is (usually) cultured, intelligent, courtly. He is of noble blood—and that is not a mere play on words. No shambling hulk of a revenant, no lurching monstrosity, despite the perversions of Anne Rice. He comes to women in their beds, but only when welcome. They turn back their camisoles, baring to him the tenderness of their throats and bosoms. Willingly, joyously. They become pallid, ethereal, more beautiful than ever as they submit to his advances. They grow weak, swooning, but with a delicious languor, lapsing into strange, incense-laden dreams of funeral luxury. They are eager to become his brides.

The love of the vampire is available to men, also. But if you shrink from the notion of such male-to-male eroticism (although there is a classic Sturgeon on short story of vampirism and homosexual love), there are female vampires as well.

Incubus and succubus, made He them both.

Datlow contributes a pleasant and somewhat illuminating introduction, but I wish she had been more thorough in her mentions of earlier vampire literature. Certainly she knows that Bram Stoker didn't invent the vampire novel with *Dracula* (1897). She is doubtless correct in stating that "*Dracula* set the standard against which every vampire novel or story writing since is measured," but I wish she had at least taken note in passing of Polidori's *The Vampire: A Tale* (1819) and J. M. Rimmer's *Varney, the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood* (1847).

In our own century, George Sylvester Viereck's *House of the Vampire* (1907) was probably the first treatment of the *psychic* vampire in fiction, and remains one of the best vampire novels ever written. Richard Matheson's *Jam Legend* (1954) and Theodore Sturgeon's *Some of Your Blood* (1961) continued the movement from supernatural into biochemistry (in the one case) and psychiatry (in the other). All three books resonate in stories in Datlow's anthology, whether known to her or not, I cannot speculate.

Any anthologist preparing a volume of vampiric tales could stick

ironically, in doing so, *F & SF* has placed itself in a more dangerous position; it has created its own competition. Stories from *Asimov's* and *Omens* which have won awards in recent years would, in past years, have been the sole property of *F & SF*. Now *F & SF* must compete for audience and material with most of the other *sf* magazines.

In its 40th year *F & SF* has retained its essential identity and remains a strong force in the *sf* short story field. It still presents an admirable diversity in styles, themes and subject matter, and in publishing the work of younger, fledgling writers alongside the old pros, and it still carries its share of powerful, solid, interesting fiction by some of the best writers in the genre—James Morrow, Gene Wolfe, Nancy Springer, Thomas Disch. With retellings of older plots and a penchant for humorous and light material, *F & SF* preserves hallmarks it has had since its inception, and which, in the '80s, have fuelled trends in *sf* literature as a whole. With its many stories on the theme of escape, the magazine displays a taste of its own.

Nevertheless, *F & SF*'s recent issues show a certain editorial looseness that detracts from their aggregate impact, and from the power of stories that really need one more revision to iron out their wrinkles. In a time when *F & SF* is no longer alone in what it does, it cannot afford this casual attitude; it has created its own competition, and now it must strive more energetically to keep its leadership position. The 40th anniversary anthology shows how good *F & SF* can be, as it enters its fifth decade, perhaps it will, with more careful and demanding attention to detail, turn a good magazine into a great one. ▲

to the tried and true Lugosiesque ambience, mining back issues of *Weird Tales* and other magazines of its ilk or commissioning laboratory resuscitations of the same musty images. The result would probably be a pretty good book, creaking a bit, and tending perhaps to stray into campiness—but still a fun read, and likely a commercial success.

Ellen Datlow's *Blood is Not Enough* is not that kind of book. Not a tell. Most of the stories in it are new, either written directly for the book, or previously purchased by Datlow in her capacity as fiction editor of *Omens* magazine and recycled here. Of the few older stories in the book, none feature traditional blood-suckers. The oldest is Leonid Andreyev's "Lazarus," first published in English in 1918, the year before Andreyev's death. (At least, as far as I can find.) I came across the story in a reprint magazine edited by Robert A. W. Lowndes some twenty-odd years ago. The title character is, yes, the very Lazarus raised from the dead by Jesus, and the story itself is a strange and memorable one.

And when it comes to strange and memorable, "Varicose Worms" by Scott Baker surely deserves a prize. Baker has a penchant for writing amazing stories; anyone who has read (or better yet heard a reading of) "The Lurking Duck" will never get over the experience. Baker is undoubtedly the premier 'pataphysician of his generation. The protagonist of "Varicose Worms," Eminescu Elade, will surely win his place among the strange protagonists of modern literature.

"Chaim!" by Harvey Jacobs is a delightful jape. It's worthy of Lord Dunsany, John Collier, or Stanley Ellin—it has that kind of wicked snap to it.

Both Datlow and the co-authors of "Down Among the Dead Men" (Gardner Dozois and Jack Dann) make much of the controversial nature of this story. I give away no surprise by telling you that it concerns a Jewish vampire imprisoned in a Nazi death camp. I fail to see the basis of the political furor the story is alleged to have created. The authors, both with strong credentials in the science fiction field, simply applied the old science-fictional technique of making a single fictional assumption and then working out the *What if* of it. I found their vampire Wernecke reminiscent of Sturgeon's memorable Hoffmanstahl and their handling of the matter equally effective. A fine story.

Susan Casper's "A Child of Darkness" is also striking—and powerfully remindful of both the Sturgeon and Matheson novels previously mentioned, while Chet Williamson's "...To Feel Another's Woe" echoes loudly of Vercreek's. Anytime spent in the world of theatre (or film, or for that matter broadcast) will validate the horror of this splendid yarn. I mean to take nothing away from Williamson when I speculate as to whether he read *House of the Vampire* before writing "...To Feel Another's Woe."

All of which is not to say that any of Darrow's authors lifted from the earlier works. Rather, this is to say that even such modern and untraditional vampire stories are still well rooted in the tradition of this peculiar branch of fantasy.

Almost all the stories in the book "worked" for me. Some did so well, others to a lesser degree, and only one or two utterly failed. In the last category I must place Pat Cadigan's otherwise admirable "Dirty Work." Every other story in the book, it seemed to me, was somehow rooted in the here-and-now, in the real world as we know it. Only that world is somehow invaded and subverted by a power of darkness.

Even Andrejeyev's "Lazarus," which takes place some 1900 years ago and more, seemed to partake of our world's realism. The vampire tale is thus an exemplar of what some academics have taken to calling "low fantasy" (in contrast to "high fantasy" which is rooted in an imaginary world rather than in our own reality).

But "Dirty Work" is a science fiction story, set in a sort of chromium-and-polished-crystal, art deco futureworld. There is a vampire theme (of the psychic sort again, no dripping fangs or flapping bats), but the feel of Cadigan's work is so totally out-of-synch with the rest of the book, I found it an unwelcome chore to read the story. Probably a terrific story—but it belongs in another book.

But not to carp. This is a fine book to curl up with on a dark and stormy night. Slip your favorite version of *Susan Lake or Night on Bald Mountain* on the CD player. And don't forget to hang a braid of garlic in the window. (Or do forget, depending on your preference.) Enjoy.

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Michael R. Collings

New Words for New Worlds: Notes Toward an Anti-Definition of Science Fiction Poetry

Recently, Andrew Joron and M. J. Engh have published articles that ask: what is science fiction poetry? Their responses to that fundamental issue vary widely, from Joron's focus on modernist poet-as-critic to Engh's more classically defined discussions of historical backgrounds and literary genres. Interwoven throughout both articles are elements of cultural, economic, political and literary history; of contemporary "establishment" poetics; and of the role and value of rhyme and meter in contemporary poetry in general as well as in poetry in particular.

While I found much to agree with in both—and much to disagree with—it seems that the central issue in the debate has perhaps been distorted.

In spite of my professional title (Professor of English), and the fact that much of my own publishing is critical and theoretical, and that I am to some degree part of the "academic establishment," I have little interest in *defining* what science fiction poetry *ought* to be. I am far more interested in exploring what those poets who refer to themselves as "science fiction poets" actually do.

In her study of the fantastic, Kathryn Hume notes that each of the definitions she incorporates in her opening chapter limits the number of texts that could be categorized as "fantastic." Certainly the more rigid paradigms radically limit possibilities—Tzvetan Todorov's, for example, would admit only a handful of texts as fantastic throughout, with the majority fitting somewhere on an extra-fantastic continuum, depending upon whether the final resolution establishes the text as Uncanny or Marvelous.

Similarly, a definition of *sf* poetry such as Joron's inadvertently limits what is possible within the sub-genre. By the strictest interpretation of Joron's definition, all rhyming, metrical, or narrative poetry could simply not be *sf* poetry.

But such a radical limitation is not, I think, what he had in mind when he discussed the role of rhyme and meter in *sf* poetry; nor was Engh's intention to limit *sf* poetry in other ways. Still, the fact remains that the act of attempting to determine a comprehensive, definitive paradigm for *sf* poetry militates against the fact of *sf* poetry.

Generally, when a literary movement can be categorized, codified, and canonized; when its chief characteristics and proponents can be neatly established; when its impact on the surrounding culture and society can be assessed and verified—in a word, when it can be *defined*, that movement is dead. The English Literary Epic appeared in multiple manifestations over many centuries, each writing moving the form slightly off center (or better yet, by establishing new norms, moving the center itself), each emphasizing a particular structure or theme or subject or approach. Only with the appearance of Milton's *Paradise Lost* was it possible to *define* comprehensively what the English Literary Epic was—what it attempted, how it functioned, how

it was structured, and how it fit within the cultural context that developed it. But *Paradise Lost* was also the last successful English Literary Epic.

Long narrative poems on lesser biblical or historical subjects, couched in imitative and excessive Miltonic blank verse, most often written in twelve books, continued to appear throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and a few well into the twentieth). While poets on the order of Pope, Byron, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning understood the vital epic impulse that survived beneath the rigidity of form, and willingly modified that form to meet the requirements of their genius (often overtly parodying the excesses of traditional literary epic), lesser poets fell into the trap of assuming that imitating formal requirements equated with producing effective poetry. Literary fossils such as Timothy Dwight's *America: Or a Poem on the Settlement of the British Colonies* (1780) and Joel Barlow's ambitious but numbingly conventional *Columbiad* (1807) attempted to recreate the majesty of Miltonic epic by adhering to a rigid formulation of rules. As a consequence, they are static, virtually unreadable artifacts: social, historical, or cultural reconstructions of a lithified literary form, complete with catalogues of dead devices and appropriate Latinate diction. But in an age when the epic impulse had transferred itself from narrative poetry to the novel, those poems remained little more than novelties, footnotes to a literary form. Interesting to look at. Unusual. Sometimes even intriguing. But they ceased to make any difference to the culture. They were born dead.

Joron defines science fiction poetry by stating that it is a "modernist form of poetry, a kind of writing that experiments with the very substance of language itself—its sounds and syntax." To specify that *sf* poetry is a subset of "modernist" poetry implies that it conforms to specific, demonstrable paradigms; the inescapable suggestion is that poems relying on non-modernist paradigms (for example, the traditional devices of rhyme and meter) cannot—or at least *should not*—be classified as *sf* poetry. By the critical act of establishing such rigid boundaries, Joron encapsulates *sf* poetry. Yet what Engh notes about the evolution of modernist poetry itself is also true: the very forms that were explorative and extrapolar and iconoclastic a generation ago are now considered *de rigueur*. The radicals have become the establishment. And if *sf* poetry can be simply incorporated under a general rubric as a "modernist form of poetry," it may have already lost much of its viability as an extrapolar or speculative form.

A corollary to this bit of literary investigation is that I do not wish to see *sf* poetry defined. I do not wish to be able to look at the form or content of a poem and say, with the confidence of a distanced, unchanged scholar making academic pronouncements over a dead artifact, that *this is a science fiction poem*. Instead, I am far more interested in seeing how different minds respond to the needs of a new

world. Because that is what science fiction is, and by extension I think that is what science fiction poetry must be (and here, of course, I contradict my own thesis by offering my definition of the form).

It has been argued that science fiction is not the same as science fiction poetry. Some have in fact gone so far as to suggest that the extrapolative, narrative impulse underlying science fiction is almost automatically inimical to poetry. Yet if we are going to use the term, it would seem that we must accept the full implications of that term. Science fiction poetry is poetry that at some level engages science fiction. Granting for the moment the obvious tautology, I would argue that there is some merit in examining the terminology, not in terms of what *sf* poetry must be, but rather in terms of what it has generated in different writers.

First, *science*. This may be the easiest of the three terms to accommodate. If poetry reflects our obsession with technological developments, but more importantly, it reflects our awareness of an increasing dependence on them. We already live in a science-fictional world. The cross-generic writings that touch upon science fiction from multiple directions are legion: mainstream fiction, westerns, fantasy and horror, romance—again and again, we find subtle elements of extrapolation that suggest the importance of the future, of technological change. Many such touches are almost subliminal; others are increasingly overt.

Science fiction poetry need not necessarily be limited as to subject or theme. The scientific element may be overt and pronounced, just as easily, it could be subtle and assumed, part of the necessary background of the poem without which the work could not exist. But somewhere, no matter how layered, the poem must confront perhaps the central issue of human life in our generation: assessing the technology that shapes and reshapes our world.

If that were all the *sf* poets needed to be concerned with, of course, it should be sufficient to speak not of *sf* poetry but simply of "Science Poetry." Robert Frazier, himself an important *poet*, has in fact used the term—in such a way, however, as to suggest that there are essential differences between the two forms. And I think that there

are, because we do refer specifically to "science *fiction* poetry."

Joron is correct when he writes that "many *sf* readers have a prejudice against any kind of writing that doesn't tell a story, including most of modern poetry." He notes also that fan poetry tends to be bad, not because it is poorly imagined or handled but because (among other things), it simply recycles "all the standard *sf* storylines and situations."

But I would argue that the kernel of fiction must be present—that a narrative must exist within or through the poem. The *sf* poem need not tell a story; many of Joron's best works do not. But it can itself be a story—a fictive re-creation of a world that does not exist but might, or a world that should exist but doesn't, or a world that must not exist but possibly (even probably) will. Throughout, whether communicated through symbol and image, or through more traditional narrative forms, *sf* poetry does tell a story—what Orson Scott Card defines simply as a series of causally related events. And that emphasis on story—which requires teller and listener, creator and auditor—is crucial.

But science fiction poetry should not be defined in terms of adherence to or deviation from literary forms. To employ any of the established forms is not necessarily reactionary; it is rather to make full use of the arsenal that is the birthright of any poet. Frequently, an *sf* poem may look simultaneously in two directions, as I attempted in one of my most successful pieces, "The Last Pastoral," which consciously juxtaposed the static, formalistic rhythms and rhyme of Renaissance pastoral love poetry against a futuristic, extrapolative setting. One of the unspoken points of the poem was the contradiction between the two, the inability of the past to answer all of the questions the future might pose. Without a deliberate concentration on rhyme and meter—at the same time attempting to fragment that absolute pattern as subtly as possible—the poem could not have come to life.

It is also the poet's right to deny those historical precedents. If poetry may indeed focus on stylistic exploration—as long as the poets are aware that even that iconoclasm has itself become a variety of historical precedent.

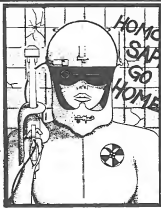
Reading through *StarLine*, the Rhysling Anthologies, Frazier's *Burning with a Vision*, Steve Rasnic Tem's *Umbral Anthology*, Lee

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Ballentine's *Poly*, and the collected and individual works of Bruce Boston, Andrew Joron, Robert Prazier, Jonathan Post, Tom Digby, and others, what I find is not a similarity of form or approach, but rather a similarity in direction and complexity of responses by individual minds to technological world-view. Individual poems may incorporate new widely varying patterns—Joron's verbal surrealism, or Susan Palwick's narrative approach, or Robert Prazier's historical and personal poems that assume rather than assert science, technology, and extrapolation.

The poets that make up the growing sf poetry community will diverge in their approaches and forms; on more subtle, deeper levels, they are united in their attempt to forge a poetry that communicates the needs of the age. Not every sf poet will be concerned with whether or not it is (sometimes possible to write an sf haiku (as was debated hotly in *Star Trek* some years ago). Not every poet will wish to explore the poetic potentials in the often unpronounceable polysyllabic,

inherently non-metrical, non-imagistic, often stultifyingly jargonistic technical vocabulary that clutters our non-literary communications. Not every poet will be interested in poetically structured stories of space flight and ray guns.

But all of those possibilities—and others—by right belong to contemporary poets. The final criterion for assessing sf poetry should not be merely the kind of form chosen to express a science-fictional idea, but rather the facility with which the poet controls, develops, and deepens whatever form the poem requires. Traditional narratives, couched in meter and rhyme, may in fact become innovative, forward-looking, exciting; modernistic imagistic fragmentation can become as trite and stereotypical as any other literary device. The difference should, and must, lie within the poet. ▴

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Nightshade by Jack Butler

New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989; \$18.95 hc; 276 pp.

reviewed by Greg Cox

Some authors should not be allowed to promote their own books. Before I even read one page of *Nightshade*, Jack Butler almost turned me off the book by declaring in a press release that it was "the first full-boogie literary science fiction novel" (emphasis his). Never mind that trashy, non-literary stuff the rest of the field has been churning out for the last several decades, from H. G. Wells to Kim Stanley Robinson.

Arrgh!

Despite my righteous indignation and/or wounded ego, I did read *Nightshade*, which is, on the surface, the story of John Shade, a centuries-old vampire currently living amidst the human colonists of a partially transformed Mars. Shade is manipulated by the Earth-dominated government of Mars into infiltrating the rebellious, underground society of "jangleers," humans whose brain matter has been replaced, in whole or in part, by cybernetic attachments. In the course of his (un)death-defying adventures, he hooks up with a genuine artificial intelligence, falls in love with and marries a jangler beauty, kills a few people to slake his bloodlust, and, whenever he has the chance, ruminates lyrically on everything from low-gravity sex to the importance of desks. It is the latter passages, in fact, that are *Nightshade's* real reason for being: the plot itself, involving much subterfuge and frenzied activity, is treated with something resembling contempt.

"The return of his smartass tone and the need for action irritated me. Thought is the one genuine pleasure, but the monotonous universe keeps breaking in with its schedules, its insistence on stupid repetitive melodrama, and bingo, bango, boingo, there you are in Car Chase City again."

Which raises the question, then, of why a narrator (or author) who feels that way wants to write about a vampire secret agent on the run? Unless, as seems possible, he's being deliberately perverse. Butler is a versatile and dextrous writer who, it strikes me, is sometimes too clever for his book's own good. Assuming, that is, that a novel should be more than a display of artifice and ingenuity.

ENDING ALERT! ENDING ALERT!
READ NO FURTHER IF YOU LIKE SURPRISES.

Take, for example, the way Butler handles the final, climactic battle between the jangleers and the authorities. First, he describes it from the highly unreliable point of view of a character (Shade) who is hallucinating wildly at the time. Then he skips ahead several decades to show the survivors trying, in relative leisure, to reconstruct what happened on that terrible night way back when, eventually coming up with a couple of alternate versions. Then he follows that with a self-conscious epilogue that wryly attempts to answer, point by point, all the questions left unanswered by the narrative itself. Finally, he wraps things up by revealing that the *real* narrator of this book was not Shade, whose first-person narrative we have supposedly been reading

throughout, but rather another character who has been writing as Shade. Surprise! Fooled you!

ENDING ALERT IS OVER.
RESUME NORMAL READING.

This sort of cryptic exposition is typical of a book in which the characters, while in peril of their lives and facing several urgent unresolved mysteries, stop to indulge in pages of puns and other wordplay, and in which an unidentified third-person narrator interjects Shade's memoirs on occasion in order to feed in assorted information and commentary, and in which Butler assumes an entire future religion (the "Butlerians") based on his previous novel, *Jujitsu for Christ*, and so, self-indulgently, on. With some lesser hack we might attribute such stylistic eccentricities to simple bad writing, but it seems clear that Butler, who is capable of creating gem-like monologues in a variety of convincing future dialects, is, with malice aforethought, playing head games with the reader:

"We didn't get around to asking any of those basic questions, though. You never do. Things roll on, the action sweeps you up, and by the time you have time to get down to the basics, you've forgotten what you wanted to know. Or you remember it, but can't remember what peculiar state of mind you were in that made it seem relevant."

Head games, yes, but to what purpose? To return to the question posed earlier, are style and cleverness enough? Is the plot, as Brian Stableford asked in these pages a few months back, merely an excuse to "bring on fine things?"

Well, that depends on what sort of fineries we're talking about, and how they're mixed. There are stories, and even some books, that exist mostly to be clever, stylish, witty or tricky, and some of these, such as *The Princess Bride* by William Goldman or *Who Made Steve Cry?* by Michael Bishop, I remember fondly. Like his vampire-hero, however, Butler is at his best at his most thoughtful, when he uses his stylistic gifts to examine seriously the world and his characters:

"I took you with a look and a few words when you were a young man. Your mother had been right not to trust me. With a tone of voice, I changed you from what you had thought you would be. I went away then for ten years. I came back to harvest what I had planned, and you were ready. I made it seem an accident, this later meeting, but I think you must have known, and have hated me for playing with you, as you would have seen it, for those ten lonely years. And you walked with that patience that love calls contentment."

Passages like this lead one to take the story and characters seriously, which is why, fascinating and quotable as *Nightshade* often is, I too got annoyed at the return of that "smartass tone" Butler so often adopts, as well as his full-boogie literary games. *Nightshade*, in the end, was a book with paragraphs that one could read over and over, but also a book which I could, and sometimes did, put aside for days at a time

without feeling any compulsion to open up again. If this ends up as an ambivalent response, part recommendation, part warning, then maybe that's because Butler has mixed motives of his own, trying to have his vampire of spy novel and stay above it too, writing a serious story about real characters and undercutting it as well:

"Oh this is a tale of marvelous creatures, of beauty and beast and the brain, a fable from never-never time. It is a tale of pretty horrors and well-wrought pain, it is an archaic brocade of golden wool, a measured piece. There is no thing in it to stir your drifting heart with too pointed a moral, too sudden a truth. It is only a story to ease you to sleep, the soothing cadence of an imagined and long-lost voice."

Only Begotten Daughter by James Morrow

New York: William Morrow, 1990; \$18.95 hc; 312 pp.

reviewed by Brian Stableford

There are several items of our cultural history which are so absurd as to be quite unbelievable, but they not actually happen. It is at least arguable that the most unbelievable of all these actualities is the astonishing heritage of a small group of Middle Eastern tribes which might easily have been extinguished from the historical record more than two thousand years ago, when they first fell on very hard times. That the said group survived these hard times seems to have been due in large measure to the particular style of its religious culture, which enabled its people to retain fervent faith in their particular God and to refuse all others, even in the face of every possible evidence that his responses to their prayers were decidedly haphazard. It is possible that these tribesmen were the first to discover the resilience of true humility—the gift of telling themselves that if things went wrong it was probably all their fault, and even if it wasn't, who were they to demand anything better?

These tribesmen contrived to go one better than the more powerful cultures which surrounded them by inventing an entirely phonetic kind of writing, but in a curiously unfortunate fashion they omitted to invent vowels. One unintended consequence of this was

Like I said, quotable but to what point? Alfred Bester and Harlan Ellison, to name only two of the more obvious examples, have brought equal quantities of literary chutzpah and stylistic flourishes to the field of science fiction, as have Margaret Atwood and other visitors from the world of mainstream fiction; they, however, have produced cohesive works where style and story worked together for the benefit of the reader, not merely to bring in fine paragraphs for the greater glory of the author.

I'll be curious to see what follows *Nightshade* (another religion, perhaps?), but in the Butlerian church I remain, if not an apostate, at least an agnostic. ▶

that the script was entirely adequate for its primary purpose—as a sacred *aide memoire* to assist in the keeping of traditional knowledge and wisdom—but not quite adequate to spawn the secular corollaries to which vowel-laden Greek ultimately gave more abundant birth: analytical philosophy, formal logic and rhetoric, and—most important of all—rigorous scepticism.

Later generations of these tribesmen suffered every imaginable historical catastrophe, the diaspora, various pogroms and the Holocaust representing periodic extremes of an ongoing tragedy. In order to add the most excruciating possible insult to this catalogue of appalling injuries, their God was hijacked and adopted into a new religion of unparalleled ridiculousness, perversity and intolerance, whose most hated heretics they then became. Despite the murder of millions, some of their descendants came through it all, having been forewarned—and perhaps philosophically forearmed—by the most horribly prophetic of all their many horribly prophetic books, which told the story of Job.

The modern-day inheritance of this cultural tradition is, as will readily be appreciated, very remarkable. Those who contemplate this

Read This

Recently read and recommended by Christopher Hinz:

Grass by Sheri S. Tepper (Doubleday Foundation, \$18.95) An evocative semi-hard of novel (yes, semi-hard, like warm molasses, able to flow into places where the solid stuff can't penetrate) focusing on the numerous idiosyncrasies of cultural blindness. If you like your stories simultaneously well-plotted and wild, your planetary ecosystems strange and intricate, your protagonists morally-motivated, and your monsters large and terminally pissed off; if you prefer ruminated fiction submerged in human conscience, then come—grazing on Tepper's prairies. No Astrofurf here; this is the real thing.

The Motion of Light in Water by Samuel R. Delany (Plume, \$8.95). Everything you always wanted to know about Mr. Delany's younger days but might never venture to ask. Vivid, fascinating and bold; a journey into a great squirming forest of a back yard, alive with authorial preconceptions, sixties countercultural loons, and East Village territorial oddities. Trim this back yard with an idyllic white fence, dim it with unbridled sexual discovery, and listen to what the neighbors really think about the "L" word.

The Silence of the Lambs by Thomas Harris (St. Martin's Press, \$18.95). Ever sink—literally—into the throes of a nightmare? That is, instead of trying to claw your way to consciousness, just let the terror overwhelm, fall into the feeling, permit awareness to disintegrate, dissolve into the birth memories that pre-date the wedges, words, and spheres of Twentieth Century American Cognition. This is the scariest of the paths into natal-natal land, a route which I suspect Harris's villains may have taken one too many times, forgetting that the old

control rods had better be in pretty good shape before you go diving into the primal mess. Twisted is not the right word for the fictional Buffalo Bill and Dr. Lecter, nor, I suspect, is it applicable to those other real-life planetary creatures known as serial killers. I finished this book in one sitting and felt like a butterfly poked to the ultraviolet for what was left of the day. A disturbing work by a fine suspense novelist.

The Reading Railroad: History of a Coal Age Empire. Volume 1: The Nineteenth Century by James L. Holton (Garrigue House, \$55.00). For a time, in the eighteen-seventies, the Reading Railroad was one of the richest corporations in the world. With the nimbleness of a steam locomotive "hogger," Holton traverses an era when coal was king and where the transportation of black diamonds—from the mines to tidewater—affected the lives of millions. Flash back to an era when freshwater pirates terrorized the canal and air and water pollution was a new experience. These were the days of real labor/management strife, when the Reading's most colorful president, Franklin Gowen, personally led a campaign to crush the Molly Maguires, that murderous secret society of Irish Catholics (Gowen was an Irish Protestant).

On a different level, this book could serve as a down-to-Earth model on the methodology of constructing a believable society. From governmental regulation of industries to the crippling inadequacies of American management (as compared to the Japanese), Holton's well-balanced, thoroughly-researched study of a bygone era helps illuminate just how, why, and where we were switched onto our contemporary tracks.

history, and the religious ideologies which were its prime mover, are brought into confrontation with absurdities and ironies so horrific as to beggar the imagination—but also with an exemplary story of grace under pressure which affirms that even in the darkest circumstances possible there can still be life, hope and humor. The novels into which such contemplation is imported offer a unique perspective, in both rational and emotional terms, on such vital matters as the significance of human suffering and the problem of evil—a perspective which tends oxymoronically to combine the darkest, angriest, bitterest kind of sarcasm with the most open-hearted, benevolent and tearful kind of sentimentality.

Novels of this kind often qualify as mordant black comedy even when they are novels of manners which operate on the mundane level. When they stray—as the grotesque nature of that which is to be contemplated frequently encourages them to do—into those realms of the fantastic where abstract philosophical questions can be made concrete in order to be directly addressed, they can unleash storms of thought and feeling which are terrifying in their ferocity, savage in their hilarity, and heart-warming in their generosity. Several notable novels of this gloriously multi-faceted type have been published within living memory; examples include Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, Bernard Malamud's *God's Grace* and Jeremy Leven's *Satan*. James Morrow's *Only Begotten Daughter* is the latest, the most vivid, and perhaps the best of the lot. It has enormous chutzpah and schmaltz by the bucketful, and despite the relentlessness of its darker side it still contrives, against all odds, to carry its due quota of pure *mechaheh*.

As the title indicates, *Only Begotten Daughter* is a sequel to the New Testament. God, without taking the trouble to explain Her reasons, causes another of Her children to be incarnated in the world of men and women. This time, perhaps for the sake of variety, She sends a daughter. Forewarned—and perhaps philosophically forearmed—by the sad precedent of Jesus (whose eventual fate is here revealed), the virgin father of the new incarnation and the unfortunate girl herself must struggle to figure out exactly what it is that a child of God is supposed to do in and for the modern world.

Readers of James Morrow's previous novels will not be unduly surprised that it is he, rather than a feminist of the female variety, who has chosen to tackle this project; in both *The Conquest of Lies* and *This is the Way the World Ends* daughters play a key role as hostages to fortune. For Morrow's characters—and, one is inclined to presume from the fact that his writings reveal him as an uncommonly honest man, for Morrow himself—daughters are the focal point of pure (i.e., unselfish) love, joyous hope and the horrific desperation of knowing that the object of one's purest love and most joyous hope has to live in the world which history has made. Julie Katz, the central character of *Only Begotten Daughter*, is at one time led by her existential plight to go voluntarily into Hell—a real, no-punches-pulled Dantean Hell run by a real no-punches-pulled Father of Lies—and is subsequently led by said same existential plight to return to the world, whereupon things begin to get really tough for her.

Voltaire once remarked that if God had made men in his own image, men had certainly returned the compliment. Like so many of the remarks which strike the modern ear as excellent distillations of great wisdom this was rather a paradoxical thing to say, given that

Voltaire lived in a post-Cartesian age when the God of the philosophers had been moved by the exercise of pure (i.e., un-faithful) reason to some unimaginably distant location outside time and space and to some equally unimaginable and essentially unknowable state of being. Nevertheless, the observation is true; the philosophers have only been explorers in search of the unfindable, while the true makers and inventors of Gods have been men of a different stripe: the artisan manufacturers and journeyman laborers of religions, sects and cults. This argument lies at the heart of Morrow's text, which draws heavily upon the tension inherent in Julie Katz's awkward placement between the God of the philosophers and manufacturers of religion—a tension which inexorably tears her apart. Morrow is a good enough philosopher to dwell at some length on the painful inevitability of this process, and a good enough novelist to paint its sadness and absurdity in all the colors of the emotional rainbow.

The imagery of *Only Begotten Daughter* will undoubtedly seem to some to be over the top; it is occasionally garish and certainly lacks the delicacy and tact of the religious fantasies of Robert Nathan, who can probably be credited with setting the important precedents for this kind of fiction in America. Earlier workers in this vein were all forced to observe stricter standards of decency, and even a writer like Ben Hecht, who was perfectly prepared to outrage such standards in works like *Fanny Hill*, was careful to be much more circumspect when he strayed on to the kind of hallowed ground which he explored in *A Book of Miracles*. James Morrow has taken advantage not only of the opportunity to update the God of the philosophers with the insights of modern physics but also of the opportunity to import a kind of imaginative grossness which is familiar in the artistic works of Matthias Grünewald and Hieronymus Bosch but which has only recently been made marketable (if not actually respectable) in the literary field by Stephen King and his imitators. It is a strategy which will not meet with universal approval, but those who feel that all's fair in love, combat and reasoned argument will understand—and the main point to be made is that despite the calculated overloading of gore, the argument is reasoned (as well as loving and combative).

Only Begotten Daughter is a righteously wrathful book which will, like all righteously wrathful books, enrage many of its readers. Those whom it offends will hate it very passionately—so passionately, in fact, that perhaps we ought to pause to hope that there is nowhere in the world any religious leader so egregiously evil as to condemn its author to death for daring to champion the cause of thought against the cause of his particular faith. (One used to take such things on trust, but in today's world one is compelled to hesitate before doing so.) For myself—I speak as a liberal humanist, a devout atheist and a man with a daughter—I can only say that I was proud to share each and every atom of fervor which is in it. For me, it is an admirable book in every respect. On the basis of his three previous works I had already decided that James Morrow was my favorite science fiction novelist of the 1980s; now that it has been made plain that he is still improving and broadening his scope I look forward with great anticipation to his achievements of the 1990s. ▶

Brian Stableford, the author of *The Empire of Fear*, lives in Reading, England.

Tourists by Lisa Goldstein

New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989; \$17.95 hc; 227 pp.

reviewed by Gordon Van Gelder

If every book is a journey, *Tourists* is a fine vacation.

A good vacation, by my standards, allows me to escape my worries, demands almost nothing from me, introduces me to new friends, and returns me to my world with a few souvenirs, a handful of nice snapshots and a renewed fondness for the world. Lisa Goldstein's new novel, *Tourists*, sees all the sights, pays all the fees, and even includes tips. It doesn't challenge many of my assumptions, doesn't return me changed for the better, but it makes for a good getaway.

The journey in *Tourists* takes an American family to the mythical Middle-Eastern nation of Amaz. Dr. Mitchell Parmenter takes his family on sabbatical so that he might study a 15th-century manuscript about

the legendary Jewel King of Amaz. Wife Claire spends her time abroad reading novels and indulging her alcoholism. Elder daughter Angie never leaves her room, living in a make-believe world she and her sister created. But her sister, precocious Casey, has abandoned that fabricated fantasy for the real adventure of Amaz.

Amaz is an alien world: things do not operate in the same way they do within the United States. News comes from decks of playing cards. Taxis take people where they really want to go, not where they ask to be taken. City streets shift. People say and believe strange things. Amaz is a fantastic world.

Casey, at age fifteen, is mostly on her own, since her workaholic

father has no time for the kids and her alcoholic mother has no interest. So she sets out to meet Rafiz, the pen pal she obtained when she learned she would be going to Amaz, thus start her adventures in this strange country, experiences which form the core of the novel, involve her in the battle between Amaz's two main religious factions, eventually drag Angie and her father into the mess, and finally make history in Amaz before the family packs up and returns to America. End of vacation.

It's very easy to ride along with Lisa Goldstein's story, enjoy the well-crafted locale, meet the different characters, involve yourself with the nice, engaging plot. Unfortunately, when it's over, nothing is changed. *Tourists* demands little from the reader and gives back a brief escape.

Readers of Lisa Goldstein's previous novels should not be surprised to find this one ultimately lacks depth; the problems that scar this novel are the same ones that marred *The Red Magician*, *The Dream Years*, and *A Mask for the General*. All four fantasies feature underdeveloped characters and all four fail ultimately by not making their threats stick.

Claire, the alcoholic, almost explicates the problem with the characters during one of her lucid moments:

We're all tourists in each other's lives. We all have monuments and ruins, places of strange beauty and forbidden rites chained off and locked securely so that no visitor can get in. And none of us has the guidebook to anyone else, or even the list of most commonly used phrases. We just have to get along the best we can (p. 128).

The fact is, however, that visitors can get past the chains and locks, around guards and sentries. When they do, *intimacy* results. Intimacy is exactly what Lisa Goldstein's fiction lacks, insight into the motives and dreams of those closest to the protagonist. Kici's failure to reach the red magician's "forbidden rites," her failure even to find out why he stays with her, utterly ruined that novel for me. "Land of Peace," Lisa Goldstein's most recently published work (to my knowledge: *Interzone* #30, Jul-Aug 1989) features an alien woman swathed in veils, dense as stone, who speaks one significant word to the tour guide protagonist: "No." To my mind, she embodies this impenetrable attitude, the same one that allows *Tourists* to contain characters that rival any bit role in a tv sitcom for one-sidedness: the workaholic father, the alcoholic mother, the bitter business rival, and so on. The characters are not shallow, but the narrative fails to probe their depths, refuses to reach into the cores of their existence and affect what's there. From Dr. Jara, Mitchell's associate at the university, to Mama, the shopkeeper who safely harbors Casey, from Mitchell the hard-working professor to Claire the heavy-drinking wife, nobody's identity changes. Their external conditions are altered by the events of the story, their internal conditions remain untouched. Even Angie, who undergoes the big revelation during the story that "Real is real," remains essentially Angie. Her identity is not formed or re-formed, and nothing in the book suggests that it can be. People are who they are, and that's that.

Of course, that's the danger of intimacy: letting anything near the forbidden rites can alter them permanently—which brings me to my other problem with *Tourists*: the threats carry too little weight. Lisa Goldstein's fiction never contains characters who are entirely bad, characters entirely beyond redemption (indeed, a major point of *A Mask for the General* is that the general can be saved)—and I respect her work for refusing to portray things in black and white. Just as these absolutes are avoided, however, so too are any conflicts that could force a person to make an absolute choice. In *Tourists*, this weakness is perhaps best shown by Commander Cunaq's invasion of Amaz, a (supposedly) menacing event that occurs entirely off-stage. It makes itself felt most strongly when a waitress in a McDonald's points a machine gun at the Parmenters before taking their order: the menace of the revolution is entirely undermined by the happy conclusion of the events.

More importantly, however, this weakness damages the end of *Tourists*; in fact, I believe all four novels by Lisa Goldstein are plagued by the underlying attitude that *everything works out well in the end*.

Kici sets off happily for America, Robert St. Onge ends *The Dream Years* by deciding his relationship with Solange is great so long as they're permanently meeting each other (and thus never having an opportunity for intimacy to develop), and *Tourists* ends with the Parmenters returning home to America, safe and sound. I'm happy to see that in this novel one character does not find a tidy ending—Claire. Unfortunately, the narrative then bends over backwards to indicate there will be one after all: Mitchell plans for "rescuing" Claire in the final line of the book. It doesn't work. In the "real is real" that I've known, not everything can be saved and everything doesn't work out well in the end, while reading about a world in which it does makes for a good escape, such fictions ultimately say nothing about what we readers are to do when the vacation ends. ▴

Read This

Recently read and recommended by
David G. Hartwell

Several things have been published in the last year or so that you might have missed. Certainly no one else has mentioned them in recommendations either in this magazine or elsewhere, that I have seen.* So:

True Believers by R. A. Lafferty. This is a pamphlet (from United Mythologies, P. O. Box 390, Station A, Weston, Ontario, Canada M9N 3N1), one of six by Lafferty from the publisher, who is one of that odd breed of small press publishers who publish only Lafferty, and an heroic brood they are. This pamphlet contains Lafferty's non-fiction, for which he is not well-known but should be. Gnomie, knowledgeable, neat stuff. Wait till you read his comments on other writers. Wait till they read them. (Alan Dean Foster: He scripts for trekkies awful much! And takes the green and gracious booty! He lacks the tone, he lacks the touch! He mostly makes it on his beauty.) Be the first on your block to own this book (\$3.00 U. S.).

Casting Fortune by John M. Ford. As far as I can tell, this is the most neglected fantasy book of 1989. It has not been totally ignored (Peter Heck recommended it here in issue #11), but no one seems to be saying that it is the best fantasy book of the year, perhaps because it is not a novel but a suite of stories. One has to go to the likes of Jack Vance's *The Dying Earth* for comparison. This is fine story-telling and beautiful writing. This is the best fantasy book of the year.

Dark Forces edited by Kirby McCauley. The best dark fantasy/horror original anthology of the decade of the 1980s is back in print from NAL. In paperback, with a neat new cover and "The Mist" by Stephen King moved from the last to the first place in the book. Don't miss it.

Fish Whistle/Commentaries, Uncommentaries & Vulgar Excesses by Daniel M. Pinkwater (Addison-Wesley, \$16.95). 72 short pieces, mostly from his NPR humor spots on "All Things Considered," a few of which were published here in *NYRSF* last year. Required reading for Pinkwater fans, sure pleasure and amusement for all readers. Especially in Chicago.

Science Fiction Guide edited by Charles Platt. [\$1.50/issue from Charles Platt, 594 Broadway (room 1208) New York, N. Y. 10012] "The titillating prospect of scandal and a possibility of impersonating Barry Malzberg lured me to the World Science Fiction Convention in Boston." What kind of a magazine would you expect from an opening line such as this, from the new issue #19? Send money and find out. The new issue includes a parody of a *NYRSF* meeting in Pleasantville.

Endangered But Still Vital
***Endangered Species* by Gene Wolfe**
New York: Tor Books, 1989; \$19.95 hc; \$56 pp.
reviewed by Fernando G. Gouvêa

There are many reasons to consider the science fiction short story an endangered species, especially as far as our better writers are concerned. Though the shorter forms remain one of the standard ways of entry into the field, much of the readership seems not to read them, and they are correspondingly not so well received by the publishers. Many important collections are being published by small presses (thank goodness for them!) or appearing only as paperback originals. Given this picture, it is a great pleasure to see this big collection of thirty-four stories by Gene Wolfe, one of the field's best writers, and to note that it has been released by Tor Books in the hardcover format it deserves.

It is perhaps an indication of the slowness of the market for short story collections that so many of Wolfe's stories remained uncollected before this volume. There is very little overlap with the author's earlier collections (*Gene Wolfe's Book of Days*, Doubleday, 1981; *The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories*, Timescape, 1982—this has unfortunately never had hardcover publication; *Stories from the Old Hotel*, Kerosina, 1988). Roughly half of the stories are from 1980 or earlier, which probably reflects the fact that the main focus of Wolfe's writing has shifted from shorter to longer forms in recent years. One also notes that the collection includes only one really long story (the novella "Silhouette"), and that this is from 1975. Still, the fifteen post-1981 stories are a welcome indication that Wolfe has not completely abandoned the writing of short stories.

The stories in *Endangered Species* form a dazzling display of Wolfe's talent and of his range. Though the relative scarcity of longer stories helps give this collection a generally "lighter" feel than, say, *The Island of Doctor Death*—even a cursory reading leaves one impressed by the quality of the writing and by the depth and emotional resonance of many of the stories. And of course, a cursory reading is usually not enough to do justice to Wolfe's stories: they demand, and repay, attentive and repeated reading. Wolfe packs his information very densely, and never underestimates the reader's intelligence and attention; it may be, in fact, that he occasionally overestimates them, and that some readers will find some of the stories opaque. ("Lukora" may be an example of this.) At least this reviewer, however, seems to enjoy the ride even while unsure of where the author is going.

It is not easy to pick out the more memorable stories in the book. "A Cabin on the Coast" and "In the House of Gingerbread" are beautifully understated horror stories which ably transpose fairy-tale motifs to the "real world." Even scarier are "War Beneath the Tree," which captures vividly the experience of being afraid of being replaced by a sibling (which most of us have had as children), and "When I Was Ming the Merciless," which touches so closely on the very real horrors of political and military power. This last story is also an important formal achievement: the choice and (more importantly) the tone of the narrator are for the most part responsible for the effectiveness of the story.

In a less outspoken vein, there is "Our Neighbor," by David Copperfield, a moving story about human pity and its absence in some people, again using a specific voice which is perfectly adequate to the story (and to its title). This story also has a typically ambiguous touch: the narrator tells us he is often inspired to make up stories about people he sees passing in the street, and then proceeds to tell us a "true" story about such a person (and, in fact, just such a story as one might expect David Copperfield to invent). "The Detective of Dreams" is one of Wolfe's most explicitly Christian stories, capturing very well the intensity (and the violence) of some of the parables of Jesus. "Suzanne Delage" is again very interesting in a quiet way: the narrator, looking for a truly remarkable event in his past, tells of a person to whom he has been close many times in his life, but whom he has never really seen. (In fact, he is sure he has seen her, but does not recall what she looked like.) The tone of the story is reminiscent of Wolfe's novel *Peace*, and it has a similar haunting effect.

Several of the stories present themselves as science fiction, rather than fantasy: "The HORARS of War," "All the Hues of Hell," "The Most
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Beautiful Woman in the World," and "Silhouette" are notable examples. In all of these, however, the author seems to want to emphasize that people will always interpret their experiences in mythical terms (fairy tales in "The Most Beautiful Woman . . .," religion in "All the Hues . . ." and "Silhouette"). Thus, these stories sometimes read like fantasy, even though the scientific rationale is (usually at least to some extent implicitly) there for all to see. Thus, the intensification of the shadow in "Silhouette" may indicate the presence of an alien being, or may be an effect of the illumination of his room (and thus under the control of the ship computer), but at least once in the story it is also interpreted as signalling a demonic or spiritual presence. This ambiguity of explanation is of course familiar to readers of the Lith novels; it is perhaps most explicitly stated in the two stories about genetic engineering ("The Woman Who Loved the Centaur Pholus" and "The Woman the Unicorn Loved"), where genetically engineered beasts are perceived in mythological terms, and seem in fact to acquire the characteristics of their mythological archetypes.

Many of these complex stories would certainly repay more careful examination; let us hope of scholars will be willing to put in the necessary exegetical effort. For example, it seems clear that the "Thag" cycle of stories would repay such study, as would "Lukora" and "Silhouette." (This is an assignment.) Wolfe's work is one of the few cases in the sf field where one's enjoyment might actually be enhanced by attempts at "explication de texte."

In his introduction, Wolfe describes us all as "sitting around the fire we call the sun" telling each other stories, and adds that every so often it has been his turn to entertain. While he has certainly entertained us, he has also done much more, and for that we should thank him.

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Screed

(Letters of Comment)

Fernando Q. Gouvêa, São Paulo, Brazil

Issue fifteen is quite good, though a bit lacking in reviews. The magazine seems to be developing into something quite interesting, whatever the *Short Form* people say.

I found the Panishins' piece on van Vogt quite interesting, especially in the way it threw some light on what it is that people found so attractive in him. The article fulfilled what I see as one of the basic functions of criticism: it made me want to go out and read the works it discusses. I do have a question, though: is all the personal and autobiographical part of the article based on something solid, or is it creative reconstruction by the Panishins? Both things would be valid, but I'd like to keep them distinct. Sources, please?

The review of *Soldier of Arate* puts the main question in bold relief: will there be more "Soldier" books? Word in the fan press is that there is some doubt about this, possibly due to editorial reluctance. It seems to me that would be a great loss.

So: NYRSF seems to be going well. See you next month.

[DGH: We are happy to have printed the Panishins' chapters and happy to be back to printing more reviews in proportion to the space in the magazine.]

Charles Platt, New York, New York

In reply to the letter that you published from Algis Budrys regarding the supposedly unfair or inaccurate review that you previously published of the Hubbard biography written by Russell Miller:

I'm getting very tired of reading self-righteous letters by Budrys that make insinuations, talk around the point, ask a lot of questions, scold us for jumping to conclusions, but don't actually say anything. Miller's book is full of specific, factual statements. The question obviously is: are they true, or aren't they? If they are true, then Hubbard was a compulsive liar, a fraud, an incorrigible misogynist, and a whole lot more. If, however, the statements are not true, why doesn't Budrys come right out and say so? Why, for that matter, hasn't Bridge Publications (or any other Hubbard-related organization, so far as I know) taken specific issue with Miller's most serious allegations?

After I reviewed Miller's biography of Hubbard in *The Washington Post*, that newspaper received from The Church of Scientology a three-inch-thick stack of Xeroxes of court proceedings, statements from legal counsel, and other materials, supposedly in rebuttal. When I actually took the trouble to plow through all this material, I found that most of the specific facts that were disputed related to Hubbard's war record. Even there, it was a matter of opinion. The bulk of the materials simply said what Budrys is saying: Hubbard was a great man, wrote great books, did wonderful things, and shouldn't be dismissed.

So Algis Budrys is now expressing himself very similarly to public-relations flacks at The Church of Scientology. This is not good news. Come on, A. J., let's deal with the subject matter, instead of waffling in nebulous generalities. What, exactly, were these documents that you obtained, which Miller supposedly was unable to obtain? Were they important? What, precisely, is the lesson we are supposed to learn from your to-me-incomprehensible enumeration of similarities between a play written by Cordwainer Smith and one supposedly written by L. Ron Hubbard? Was Smith guilty of plagiarism, is that what you're implying? Or was Hubbard?

Of course, it's much more convenient to be vague. You can smear a fine piece of journalism by calling it "mass-market journalism" without actually saying anything about its style, scope, and ambitions (all of which happen to be worthy). It's convenient, also, to puff up Hubbard's reputation with more vagueness. "Scientology is only one of a number of well-organized, flourishing things he created." So what are the others, and how many are there? "... an extraordinary production of stories, many of which are still showing high impact on the audience." Which stories? Which audience? I am unaware of any impact on any audience, where Hubbard's short fiction is concerned. Lastly, if Hubbard "claimed to have found what

they want to keep looking for" (the word "they" apparently referring to skeptics such as myself), well, what was it? The meaning of life? How to unleash your thetan? How to learn that you previously lived as an alien being on an alien world millions of years ago? This is supposedly the greatest "truth" that Hubbard stumbled upon.

[DGH: One of our aspirations at NYRSF is to get everyone to be as clear and specific as is appropriate to the topic. Obviously you and Sr. Gouvêa, above, agree. Perfection is perhaps unattainable, but citations are not so difficult, or should not be. Lack of specific sources and references is at very least an annoyance.]

Ralph Dumain, Washington, D.C.

The November 1989 issue was my first exposure to your review, and I am most impressed. I was particularly stimulated by John Crowley's "The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart." I didn't think there was anything more that anyone could say about utopias, but Crowley delivered some new insights. Among them, Crowley fruitfully suggests that Comenius' two realms "are not truly opposed" but "are simply two aspects of a single undertaking, or attempt: the attempt to cancel out the complexities and ambiguities of the civilizations we are born with, and to live, instead, in simpler possibilities," and adds the observations that the particular utopias conceived from Thomas More are repugnant to our contemporary sensibilities and that the people that populate them are less real.

Crowley also claims that utopians are not just social critics who uphold standards of human possibility against the shortcomings of existing societies but people who are looking for an excuse to indulge in fiction (not unlike religion, I would add). This is probably true of the more questionable utopians, but it could not be true of all, especially of those who actually tried to set up utopian socialist communes in real life. But obvious utopianism aside, Crowley would tar with the brush of "utopia" any attempt to make radical changes in society, even on the part of people with a more realistic world view. This has the danger of encouraging social conservatism. More serious than Crowley's failure to make some potentially useful distinctions, I think that Crowley's otherwise admirable analysis is inadequate on three counts: (1) failure to concretize the real world politics of utopians, (2) lack of understanding of the Russian Revolution, (3) failure to distinguish the authentic from the dubious functions of fantasy.

(1) The most questionable utopians are like religionists: they are hypocrites who fantasize about a pie-in-the-sky world while in real life are the most disgusting reactionaries.

Thomas More was no man for all seasons; he was a reactionary agent of the Catholic Church whose execution was richly deserved. The real deal was a power struggle between the Church trying to hold on to its property and power and the Johnny-come-lately monarchs coming into their own and throwing off the foreign shackles of Church power. The Catholic Church canonizes its "martyrs": its "seints" are the fallen soldiers who have died in very earthly power struggles against competing economic interests.

Aldous Huxley envisioned not only a negative utopia but a less known positive one: *Island*. Huxley was an upper middle class mystic and pacifist, spinning out elitist schemes for piecemeal social engineering (*Ends and Means*) but staying aloof from real social struggle. His pacifist convictions were tested by World War II, which he conveniently spent in Hollywood, since Europe was too dangerous for a pacifist. In sum, a hypocritical crackpot.

B. F. Skinner is the author of a utopian novel, *Walden Two*. At least one 1960s commune was inspired by his ideas. In real life, his behavior conditioning is an unscrupulous instrument of mind control. Politically, Skinner could be called a liberal—I, a social democrat—but in essence he is a social fascist.

One could go on and on, but I think you will find that many utopians (including science fiction writers) exhibit this familiar pattern of idealistic fantasies and reactionary politics. This can happen, because like religion, utopianism severs any possible connection

between means and ends, between the now and the hereafter. Those who profit off of social conflict seek to disguise the nature of their society by arbitrarily positing a society without conflict, without suffering, without human personality.

(2) It was Karl Marx who threw a monkey wrench into utopian fantasizing. Marx intellectually thrashed Proudhon's utopian arbitrariness (*The Poverty of Philosophy*). Marx explicitly refused to speculate on the socialist society of the future (no "recipes for the cookshops of the future"), but it most surely would not be a simplistic society, or a cocoon shielded from the pains of life. The kind of conflict that would come to an end would be the antagonisms engendered by a society divided into social classes, but humans would not turn into drooling goody-goody Lotus Land robots. Marx tried to find some strategy for realizing the socialist future based on understanding and dealing with the conditions of the present. Whether or not you think this is ultimately practicable, you cannot simply label it as utopian in Crowley's sense.

Engels continued along similar lines, as revealed in his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. By the turn of the century, the world had changed significantly, and Lenin had to come up with a new strategy. It is patently false to assert as Crowley does that the Russian Revolution of 1917 was born out of utopianism (any more than the American or French revolutions). The Old Bolsheviks did have lofty social ideals which they sought to realize through practical politics. Circumstances were not kind to the fledgling USSR. The Western European revolution never materialized, and an isolated poverty-stricken underdeveloped USSR was in a desperate predicament. Under those circumstances, Stalin maneuvered himself into a position of total control, where he despotically conducted a crash program of industrialization. In the early 1930s, many of the older party members were removed from preeminent positions of power. Many of these were the more idealistic types who had lived experience of their revolutionary ideals. Ironically, many of them were not from the proletarian or peasant strata, while their replacements, who really came from the peasantry and proletariat, were not idealists but upwardly mobile pragmatists (people of Krushchev's ilk). By 1936, Stalin had exterminated the Old Bolshevik leaders along with his other victims. The newer party functionaries could hardly be considered utopians. Utopian, non-utilitarian ideas were not tolerated from the early thirties through the Stalin era and afterwards (unless one considers the imagery of the "new Soviet man" utopian, but even that was strictly utilitarian). (See *Soviet Marxism* by Herbert Marcuse on Soviet hostility to transcendence.)

(3) The utopianism present in science fiction also disguises reactionary politics, as evidenced by the following examples.

H. G. Wells as a Fabian socialist was a mere social democrat. Lenin called him a philistine. Trotsky referred to his *Outline of History* as devoid of methodology and any systematic understanding of history. Wells was also a constructor of utopias. He was of course a futurist, and his futurism became ever more fanatical and escapist when he could see no practical way out of the nightmare of the 1930s.

1989 Remembered

(continued from back cover)

Allen Steele, *Orbital Decay*. A literally ambitious hard science fiction novel (about outer space construction workers) that's more about people than hardware, and quirky, unusual, and realistic people to boot. I've peeked at Steele's next book; it's good too. [GC]

Robert Westall, *Antique Dust*. The ghost story is difficult to revitalize these days, but Westall does that and more with expertly controlled pacing and plotting and solid characterization. [RK]

Gene Wolfe, *Endangered Species*. A messy collection of good stories by one of the best writers in the field. It also includes a warm, wonderful introduction by the author. [KC]

Gene Wolfe, *Soldier of Arctis*. Wolfe adopts a daring and demanding premise and delivers a rich and rewarding book. If you read any sequel this year, this should be it. [RK]

Ester Friesner, "Poe White Trash" (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*, Dec.). A redneck retelling of "A Case of Amortillado" that's worth reading not only for the sheer wickedness of the concept but also for the immortal line: "Shee-it, 22 The New York Review of Science Fiction

Was Wells anything more than an intellectual dilettante?

The sickening utopian outer space mysticism of Arthur C. Clarke has always turned my stomach. What useful information does 2007 reveal? Childhood's End smacks of fascism to me under the guidance of benevolence, although I'm sure that Clarke is a good white liberal. Clarke is also a socially irresponsible futurist fantasizer.

Then there is Robert A. Heinlein. His utopian exercise, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, fooled a lot of people, and became consecrated by many in the 1980s counterculture. The public was fooled by the seemingly avant garde nature of communal sex arrangements, though the same concept and the same world view can be found in the original reactionary utopia: Plato's Republic.

Crowley also begins to question the ideological function of science fiction, and he suspects that science fiction, rather than teaching us how to be different, "is chiefly indulging in possibilities for their own sakes," and that this craving for novelty might be a "neurotic symptom." Bravo!

Crowley indiscriminately lumps together and criticizes all makers of science fiction and fantasy. Because his approach is so abstract and schematic, he fails to make concrete political analyses of science fiction authors as I sketched above. That same schematic approach also fails to distinguish between the different types and goals of fantasy and to explain its positive functions. Firstly, the human mind in its abstract capacity functions indirectly; fantasy can be a roundabout, in fact indispensable, means of analyzing existing reality. Secondly, some creators of fantasy, including science fiction, really are interested in revealing human possibilities. This is how I would distinguish useless escapism and intellectual superficiality from really imaginative and intellectually inspiring works: the best science fiction and fantasy is that which is based upon the most profound decomposition and conceptualization of existing reality. That is, it knows how to abstract productively.

Which is why some possibilities excite me and others are just disguised versions of the same everyday ideological nonsense. In fantasy, I have long been nauseated by the medieval Tautonic world view of Tolkien and countless others. There is something profoundly antagonistic to human emancipation in such views of the world.

In science fiction, the only authors I follow are Samuel R. Delany and Stanislaw Lem. I hope that someone can point out to me other writers that are worthy of my attention, but I am very hard to please. Delany is one of the greatest living geniuses; I just pray that that pretentious deconstructionist drive doesn't rot his brain. Most of his fans are unworthy of him, and I don't think that he is aware of the enormous ideological distance that separates him from the rest of the sf pack.

Anyway, thanks Mr. Crowley, but please make your analysis more politically and theoretically precise.

[DGH: We are pleased that you have discovered us, and that you are, from your particular political perspective, joining in the call for more rigorous expression in sf, and in the discussion of sf.]

Mozzessoff! [GC]

Judith Moffet, "Ticy Tango" (*ASFW*, Feb.). This is a thunderstorm of a novella, complete with sudden distant thunder, the deluge, and bolts of electric illumination. Afterwards, calm. Hard sf of the biological sort, rarely ever done this well. [DGH]

Stephen O'Connor, "The Only Life" (*Reserve*). The young field agent for the Pest Control Commission proves that power corrupts when he releases the rat who had once been the Finnish Albert Zot. A wonderful tale of human-rodent relations. [GVG]

Lucius Shepard, "Bound for Glory" (*Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Oct.). A strange and vivid fantasy with an unusual Western frontier setting; it's about pulling one's head out of the sand and accepting the challenge of life. [RK]

Michael Swanwick, "The Edge of the World" (*Uk Spectrum* 2). This wonderfully bleak story of adolescent despair posits a flat Earth with a history not unlike our own. It is a fantasy story with a rigorous sensibility. [KC]

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From TOR Books this February

**1989 Recalled:
Read and recommended by
*The New York Review of Science Fiction:***

As a magazine that loves and publishes other people's reading lists, we couldn't let the last year pass without probing our collective memory to produce a list of our own. We don't pretend to have included every notable work that saw print in this year of falling Berlin walls and lost computers. Still, if you missed any of the works below, it's not too late to do yourself a favor and track down some highlights of the not-so-distant past.

Let's start with the books . . .

Poul Anderson, *The Boat of a Million Years*. Anderson uses as many ideas and settings in this book as some writers use in a six-volume trilogy. (KC)

Scott Baker, *Wife*. Perhaps the best horror novel of the year—giant spiders, ambiguity, and a whole lot more! (KC)

J. G. Ballard, *Memoirs of the Space Age*. Although when put all together, Ballard's space stories seem a bit too similar, they turn out to have been much more prophetic than they were perceived to be at the time they were written. (KC)

J. G. Ballard, *Ruining Wild*. The best dystopia I've read in a longtime. It's also speculative fiction, detective story, and psychological horror. (KC)

Ramsey Campbell, *Ancient Images*. This book, a horror novel up to Campbell's usual high standards, has cameo appearances by people in the British horror field whom you may recognize. (KC)

Orson Scott Card, *Prentice Alvin*. Overall, "The Tales of Alvin Maker" is for fantasy fans tired of the medieval venue and who appreciate a flowing and accessible style. (JJO)

Nancy A. Collins, *Junglauses After Dark*. Probably the best vampire novel of the year, and a promising horror debut. This is a seriously violent and disturbing novel that, on style alone, is also great fun to read. (GC)

Samuel R. Delany, *The Stratus of Messina*. In the great tradition of James Blish writing as William Atheling, Jr. . . . Delany on Delany, from a distance. Great fun, sometimes causes you to scratch your head and say, "What?" (DGH)

Katherine Dunn, *Geek Love*. Life, love, and geek-dom: what more could a reader want? (GVG)

Lisa Goldstein, *Tourists*. Although I think this is really a psychological horror novel, rather than quest fantasy, it's really very good. It is about Americans' fantasies about other countries and about themselves. (KC)

Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Fantasy and Science Fiction*. The best work of historical and critical analysis and scholarship I read this year, unsurpassed in my experience. Be warned that the "Romantic" in the title refers to the period rather than the genre. (JJO)

Alexani and Cory Panahin, *The World Beyond the Hill*. Science Fiction and the Quest for Transcendence. You don't think we'd serialize it for half a year if it wasn't good, do you? Read the rest of it, learn, and enjoy. (GVG)
(continued on page 22)

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